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The Surgeon's Stories.

By Z. TOPELIUS.

THE

SURGEON'S STORIES.

BY

Z. TOPELIUS,

PROFESSOR OF HISTORY, UNIVERSITY OF ÅBO, FINLAND.

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THE SURGEON'S STORIES.

TIMES OF ALCHEMY.

BY

Z. TOPELIUS.

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The Surgeon's Stories.

SIXTH CYCLE:

TIMES OF ALCHEMY.

Part I.—Evening Storms.
Part II.—Morning Light.

CONTENTS.

PART I.—EVENING STORMS.

INTERLUDE		9
CHAPTER I.	At Falkby in East Gothland	10
CHAPTER II.	Countess Esther	16
CHAPTER III.	The Bertelsköld Family in 1771	21
CHAPTER IV.	Step-Mother and Step-Son	26
CHAPTER V.	Lightning in the Thunder-Cloud	31
CHAPTER VI.	The Farewell	36
CHAPTER VII.	The Song of the Pasture-Girl	42
CHAPTER VIII.	A Country at Auction	47
CHAPTER IX.	The Highest Offer	52
CHAPTER X.	An Audience with Gustaf III.	58
CHAPTER XI.	Paul Bertelsköld's Arrival Home	64
CHAPTER XII.	A Dangerous Subject	69
CHAPTER XIII.	Inexplicable Enigmas	73
CHAPTER XIV.	Gathering Storms	78
CHAPTER XV.	The Rift in the Ice	84
CHAPTER XVI.	The Storm Breaks Loose	88
CHAPTER XVII.	The Old Story of Two Brothers	93
CHAPTER XVIII.	On Swedish Ground	98
CHAPTER XIX.	Conspirator Against Conspirator	104
CHAPTER XX.	The Burgher-Wives	109
CHAPTER XXI.	The Seat of the Councillors' Wives	115
CHAPTER XXII.	Marchioness Egmont	120
CHAPTER XXIII.	Storming a Heart	125
CHAPTER XXIV.	Hate and Love	132
CHAPTER XXV.	King Gustaf III.	137
CHAPTER XXVI.	Signs and Warnings	142
CHAPTER XXVII.	Intrigues and Spider-Webs	148

CHAPTER XXVIII. Affair Number Five - - - 154
CHAPTER XXIX. Conclusion of Affair Number Five 160
CHAPTER XXX. Another Disappearance - - - 164
CHAPTER XXXI. The Newspapers and their Readers 168
CHAPTER XXXII. The Spider in the Net - - - 174

PART II.—MORNING LIGHT.

INTERLUDE - - - - - - - - - - - 180
CHAPTER I. The Thralldom of Mammon - 185
CHAPTER II. The Constellation of the 14th of January, 1318 - - - - - 190
CHAPTER III. In the Hunting Lodge at Brunswick - - - - - - 197
CHAPTER IV. The Border of Eternity - - - 202
CHAPTER V. The Old and the New Man - - 208
CHAPTER VI. The Battle for a Human Soul - - 215
CHAPTER VII. Two Women's Love - - - 221
CHAPTER VIII. The Tempter in the Wilderness - 228
CHAPTER IX. The First Trial - - - 234
CHAPTER X. The Conspirator and the Private Secretary - - - - - - 240
CHAPTER XI. A Great Actor - - - - - 247
CHAPTER XII. The Festival at the Zoölogical Garden 253
CHAPTER XIII. The King of the Wise Among Fools 260
CHAPTER XIV. The Second Trial - - - - 266
CHAPTER XV. The 18th of August - - - 272
CHAPTER XVI. The Hobgoblin with the Red Cap - 279
CHAPTER XVII. The 19th of August - - - 285
CHAPTER XVIII. In the Midst of Jubilation - - 291
CHAPTER XIX. A Name - - - - - - 297
CHAPTER XX. The Third Trial - - - - 304
CHAPTER XXI. At Flinta's Cottage - - - 310
CHAPTER XXII. An Evening in Rosy Clouds - - 317
CHAPTER XXIII. The Morning of the Realm - 323
CHAPTER XXIV. Morning Light at Falkby - - 328

TIMES OF ALCHEMY.

PART I.—EVENING STORMS.

INTERLUDE.

WHEN the Surgeon had finished his story of "The Freethinker," the old grandmother shook her gray head with displeasure. She did not like a freedom of thought of such a kind as Paul Bertelsköld's, and much less would she relate such thoughts in the presence of children. She had, therefore, with no failure to appreciate the curiosity of the small auditors, sent them to bed at the beginning of the story about the discussion at Åbo, and was weighing in her mind how far she ought at all to let them listen to further stories of such doubtful tenor. And it was only upon the most decided assurance of the Surgeon that no more atheism was to be mentioned, that the rigid censor of the attic gave her official leave for the continuation, so far as it touched an infant public, and stipulated for herself, with equal decision, that in future she was to be spared such blasphemies.

"But how will you manage that we shall be in the middle of the eighteenth century without catching an echo of that keen, universal spirit of skepticism, which at that time had laid hold of the world, and constituted at once the weakness and the greatness of that period, its fall and its restoration,—the burning purga-

tory out of which a refined faith afterward came forth purer?" gently objected the Surgeon.

"So far as I understand," replied grandmother, "we Lutherans acknowledge no purgatory, and all the stupid nonsense of those old times can therefore be allowed to die away in air. In my youth I heard a great deal which I have since been content to forget; and if there have been revilers and slanderers who have amused themselves reading the catechism backwards and making fun of sacred things, let them be left to that Judge in whose presence they have long been, to answer for their godless heresies, and not be awakened from the grave to trouble the simple faith of good Christians. But it is said as it is said; and you can go on, cousin, to more decent subjects. I confess that I am curious to hear how Countess Esther over there gets along in that aristocratic family. I am afraid she will some day have her hands full with her step-children, the poor creature!"

"It is possible," responded the Surgeon, "and we will therefore immediately remove across the sea to Sweden, where we shall again find the titled pair, at a time which, for the realm and our friends, may well be likened to an evening twilight, filled with many storms, but which nevertheless has the morning in its bosom."

CHAPTER I.

AT FALKBY IN EAST GOTHLAND.

DO you still remember the little Falkby of old, away down in East Gothland, where Gustaf Bertelsköld's widow, the noble and proud Countess Eva, spent so many lonely years in mourning weeds for her husband; where her son, Count Charles Victor,

had played in his happy childhood, and whither, one bleak winter day, he brought home Esther Larsson, who was fleeing from the wrath of her father and the slander of the Swedish metropolis?

Since that day, twenty-three years had been swept away by the billows of time, and Falkby was now quite different from what it used to be. Countess Eva had been cruelly persecuted by her powerful brother-in-law, Count Torsten Bertelsköld, and since the rigorous government of Gortz in Sweden, the greater share of the property had passed under the hammer for arrear taxes. At that time Falkby was only the shadow of a Swedish nobleman's country-seat, and, with more courage than success, its possessor was struggling against the pressure of poverty. But since then the fate of Falkby had considerably brightened.

Countess Eva had lived to see the day when her heartless brother-in-law, unexpectedly snatched away from his high-soaring plans, had been obliged to leave his great property as an inheritance to his nephew, and she had closed her changeful life in undisturbed happiness, surrounded by wealth and filial affection. The son, Charles Victor Bertelsköld, had not only restored to the property all its former belongings, but had also, a little distance from the humble one-story house of yore, had a magnificent three-story castle erected, surrounded by an extensive and costly garden, with a park, the whole according to an old drawing, which still exists, of the Bertelskölds' former family-seat, Majniemi Castle, in Finland. The present count had been very careful about erecting the new Falkby in the very same style, and it had cost him an enormous sum; but then the castle was a master-work of the style of the seventeenth century, with beautiful façades, expensive statues of bronze, and other features of splendor, which are more particularly described in one of our former stories. Behind the oaks of the park, however, the old building remained undisturbed, in the same

condition as when it was inhabited by the mother of the present possessor; and beside it still dwelt honest Bergflygt, the gardener, who in his younger years had been selected by Countess Eva as the present countess's husband,—a match which might reasonably be reckoned among the best, since nothing came of it, but whose memory by no means disturbed the friendly confidence between mistress and servant.

The honest gardener was now an affable old man of sixty, who had not laid his rejection so badly to heart but that he had a year later chosen as his wife a rosy daughter of a saddler from Linköjning, at whose side his quiet life flowed on like a flourishing cabbage-field, without special worms on the leaves, until he obtained the honorable but responsible charge of laying out the magnificent new garden, after the somewhat antiquated model from the time of Louis XIV. The good man was then conscious of having his hands full, for on that point his master was inexorable, and woe unto that hedge which was not trimmed according to the model, that walk which did not wend its bee-line to its goal, or that tree which did not stand precisely where it ought to stand! With many a deep sigh had Bergflygt finally succeeded in doing that technical violence to nature, which, in the time of Louis XIV, was regarded as the height of refined taste, and, as often happens, became enamored of his own work until he was ready to wager his neck that nothing could be more beautiful and perfect than this very garden. But then, when he had just got done with his distinguished model in the higher peruke style, it happened that his master, one fine day nineteen years ago, brought home his former flame, the young countess; and this event made a revolution at Falkby.

Countess Esther Bertelsköld, *née* Larsson, had the inborn commonplace taste to look upon nature's own models as incomparably more charming than the most brilliant invention of a French gardener, and, as she

had an unlimited influence over her husband, it was no longer than until the next spring before poor Bergflygt was obliged to do over again the troublesome work already done. The straight walks were curved anew, the stubbed hedges gained a certain degree of freedom, the peruke-style was sentenced to banishment, and the garden once more, as nearly as possible, approached rural simplicity. For two years, Bergflygt secretly grumbled about "that Finnish calf-pasture which would do very well for cattle," the third year he found it endurable enough, and a year later he maintained that even others besides oxen might find pleasure in his new arrangement; and finally, after the great Linnæus had one summer visited Falkby, and flattered him with a few friendly words about the successful institution, Bergflygt boldly claimed that in all the zones of the earth not a park was to be found which could be compared with Falkby. "That, you know, is what I have always said," he would say; "a garden ought to be for people, and not for stone images; but the count would not hear a word of that, until I at last succeeded in getting the countess to listen to reason."

One fine spring morning, about this time, Bergflygt, the gardener, was earnestly engaged in decorating a pretty summer-house in the park, with flowers and foliage, in honor of two remarkable events in his master's family. The immediate occasion soon disclosed itself in the following conversation between the gardener and his Skånian assistant who was poling the beans:

"Wonderful!" said the Skånian, "how grandly you are fixing things up to-day! It is for the gracious count, I suppose?"

"Yes, indeed, Rasmus," replied the gardener; "this is the gracious master's birthday. To-day he completes his fifty-sixth year, you must know."

"Yes, I knew that. He is getting to look older all the time. He might be your father."

"He is five years younger than I, Rasmus. But he broke his leg thirty years ago, and since then his health has not always been good."

"What! Broke his leg, did he? It could never have been while on a spree, like some others, I suppose?"

"Shame on you, boy, and take care how you speak about the gracious count! He has had such things to think about as give gray hairs."

"Do tell! Just as if such a fine gentleman could have anything to think about but to eat meat five times a day, and sleep till broad daylight, and wear nice clothes! But perhaps it is her grace, who is so strict and trying?"

"I tell you, Rasmus, if you presume to forget that respect due from you to her grace, I will try those mountain-ash sticks on your back. Even if it were proper to speak of the gracious pair as we would speak about common folks, I would tell you that in the whole kingdom of Sweden there is not a better wife to a better husband. Do you understand it, rascal?"

"Oh, yes, I understand. She is a good deal the more capable in her house, it is said, and more generous to the poor, though it is said she understands witchcraft. And she knows pretty well that there are twenty marks to the lispund, for you see her father is said to have been a butter merchant in Russia."

"I will lather you!" exclaimed the gardener, as in his anger he seized the nearest mountain-ash whip, to execute his threat.

Rasmus betook himself to entreaty. "I will hold my mouth like a mole," he protested, and looked more stupid than a field-mouse. "You know you said yourself that his grace had got gray hair."

"That is what I said," responded Bergflygt; "but it is not her grace's fault,—it is young Count Bernhard's."

"Oh! That was it! It used to be said that the

young count was awfully conceited and stubborn. And then it is said that he cannot bear his mother, because she understands the steelyard business."

The gardener gave a couple of flourishes with the mountain-ash stick, but, probably fancying that he had himself gossiped more than was exactly prudent, he contented himself with the declaration that people talked nonsense. This very day her grace was going to celebrate the young count's return from Spain, and people ought to understand from that, that everything was as it should be.

"Good gracious! I wonder if he is black as a Moor!" suggested the guileful boy. "What has he had to do in Spain?"

"He has been secretary to his royal majesty's ambassador, and is now coming back to the diet, to hear how the new king swears about liberty."

"Indeed! Will the king swear about liberty?" inquired the assistant. "Well, I like that! But I almost think the young count will not fancy the same, for, the fact is, people say that liberty is a fine thing for the masters."

"Ass!"

"Well, well, you might as well call me a horse, for I have not been in Spain. Is it true that there is another young nobleman who has gone to the Finns to learn the black art? You see, then, I can get it into my head why his grace has got gray hair, for you see when both wife and child addict themselves to such practices, it is almost too much."

But now the good gardener's patience gave way, and a dozen vigorous blows from the mountain-ash stick taught the knavish servant to have respect for his master and mistress—and for Finnish witchcraft.

CHAPTER II.

COUNTESS ESTHER.

WHILE the mountain-ash stick was still merrily buzzing around the ears of the Skånian, that person gained an unexpected ally in distress. A girl of eight years, frolicsome, happy, dark-eyed, beautiful as night and day, at a distance became aware of the performance, and like a rocket flew over the curved walks. Before the gardener as yet suspected her presence, she already stood behind him, laid hold of the mountain-ash whip, snatched it from him and broke it in two.

"Bergflygt, you must not strike Rasmus! Nobody must fight in the park!" said she, half angry, half laughing.

The astonished man let the delinquent go, turned around and fretfully muttered: "Are you here again, now? The little lady will do nothing, then, but mischief. Rasmus is a rascal, and ought to be driven out of service."

"You only are bad, Bergflygt!" willfully cried the girl. "I like Rasmus. He made boats and mills for me at the brook. There, don't cry, Rasmus! Here, you shall have a bun."

"My gracious!" said the Skånian, ashamed and cunning. "I am not crying. I had got a little dirt on my jacket, and our dear father dusted it off a little. He is so unmercifully neat."

"I will teach you to be neat!" said his exasperated superior, as he grasped after another stick. The consequence of this threatening motion was that the girl took Bergflygt by both arms, and, swinging him around,

laughed so heartily that he was finally obliged to laugh too.

"I shall tell mamma what the little lady does, just when we are in such a hurry," he growled.

"Well, Bergflygt, you can tell,—you see there comes mamma!" said the girl defiantly.

A little distance away, a tall, stately form was seen appearing between the young leaves of the park. The nineteen years since we last saw Countess Esther had made but little change in her exterior. The lustrous, dark, warm eyes were the same as of old. She had grown somewhat stouter, her features expressed more decision, and her walk and bearing were perhaps somewhat prouder. In her whole manner there was something at once commanding and agreeable, which was suggestive of her husband's former expression, that the burgher's daughter was a born princess. But of that kind of aristocracy which adores itself in a simulated condescension, there was in the Countess of Falkby not a trace.

"What is it?" said the countess, who saw her daughter, wild and dancing, holding the gardener fast.

"He wants to strike Rasmus! He wants to drive Rasmus away!" cried the girl.

"The boy has been insolent, and your grace sees, yourself, how my time is being lost," pleaded the gardener.

"Let Bergflygt go, Vera!" said the countess. "And you, my dear Bergflygt, need not lay to heart every frivolous word. Many rain-drops fall into the sea, and many a sprout shoots up at the roots of the trees. Are you done with the work?"

"In half an hour your grace's commands shall be carried out to a dot, if I can only have the favor of being let alone," sighed Bergflygt, with a furtive glance at his tormenting spirit.

"That is good," continued the countess, as she inspected the preparations. "Put everything in order,

and do not trouble yourself about this little romp. In an hour we shall drink chocolate in the summer-house, and later we expect rare company. My eldest daughter is already arrived, and Count Bernhard is expected this afternoon. I hope they will praise your good taste, for you have taken great pains, my good Bergflygt."

The gardener bowed ceremoniously, but his satisfied air plainly indicated that his brief wrath was quickly appeased.

"Sister is still asleep, and it is nine o'clock in the forenoon!" exclaimed Miss Vera, as she turned on her heel.

"Sister is tired from traveling, and at court people sleep later because they sit up later than we are used to doing at Falkby," replied the mother. "Come, it is time for you to dress for our company."

"I think I am all right as I am, mamma," said the girl innocently. "You see they are only my sister and brother."

"Your sister and brother are not accustomed to seeing run-down shoes and faded clothes," replied the mother. "Besides, it is your father's birthday."

While mother and daughter were together returning to the castle, the little one walked awhile in silence and then asked: "Mamma, is Bernhard proud?"

"Why should he be?" said the mother evasively.

"Oh, I remember how, when I was little, he once said to mamma, 'Madame, you have to thank my father that I kiss your hand.'"

"Oh, you little kettles with your ears!" said the countess with embarrassment. "Bernhard was right, of course,—he likes me because he likes papa."

"But," persisted the girl, "if he likes mamma, why does he always call her '*Madame*'?"

"That is what is said to empresses and queens. There is nothing bad in that—indeed, it is very polite."

"Well, if it is so polite, I will begin to say madame too. Madame! No, fy! how can I say so to my own mamma? Sister Louise, you see, she is wise; she calls mamma nothing at all. But how does Paul? Is Paul, too, in the habit of saying madame?"

"It is different with Paul. He has been accustomed to saying mamma ever since he was little; but Bernhard and Louise were so unfortunate as to lose their mamma when they were quite small, and so they have not been in the habit of saying so."

Vera walked a few steps, musing, but it was not her nature long to keep silence. "Are you not their real mamma?" she asked.

"Their good mamma died, and then your father asked me to be a second mother for them," said the countess. "When you grow larger, my Vera, you will understand that people can seldom love their second mother so warmly as they love their first. But they can be really good friends for all that, when they appreciate each other."

"Can any one like his half brother and half sister the way he likes his whole brother and whole sister?"

"Certainly he can, and he ought to do so. Promise me to be very friendly, very kind and cordial, toward Bernhard and Louise. It will not be difficult for you when you get more acquainted. You have not seen Louise in three years, and Bernhard in five. So you are a stranger to them, and do not rightly understand them. But it will be pleasant enough. Louise is very agreeable and sensible, and can tell you beautiful things about the court, for she was maid-of-honor to the queen before she was married, three years ago, to the Saxon minister, Baron Clairfeld."

"But I think more of Paul, for all that!"

"And Bernhard," continued the mother, without pretending to hear her, "Bernhard is a stately young gentleman, who has seen much of the world on his foreign travels. He can tell you still more charming

things about fine Spanish knights, and bull-fights, and black Moors, and lions of Africa. You will be charmed to hear him."

"But I think more of Paul, for all that!" persistently repeated the girl, and shook her handsome curly head with displeasure.

"I believe there is a bit of Finnish in you!" merrily responded the mother. "Love all your brothers and sisters sincerely. You need not on that account think less of Paul."

"But, mamma, do you not think that Paul is a hundred times better than both Louise and Bernhard? He is much handsomer, and much more courageous and friendly and sincere! Oh! I am so lonesome for my own brother Paul! Will he not soon come back from that bad Finland?"

"I am expecting a letter soon, and perhaps he will come to visit us this summer. But why are you so displeased with Finland? Both your father and I were born in that country."

"Old Beata says that the Finns are only half human. And then they understand witchcraft. . . Folks say that you understand it too, mamma, and that you have bewitched papa. But I can never believe that," very *naïvely* protested Vera.

The countess flushed. She very well knew that senseless, opprobrious report; and now she must hear it from her own child!

CHAPTER III.

THE BERTELSKÖLD FAMILY IN 1771.

THE festival which Countess Bertelsköld had arranged for her husband's birthday was simple, charming, and worthy, like herself. The programme was as follows: At one o'clock, congratulations in the summer-house; at two, dinner for the poor; at three, a few old friends invited for the evening, to enjoy some old Hungarian wine and a little display of fire-works; and lastly, as a festival gift, the return of the eldest daughter and son, which surprise the countess had requested purposely for this very day.

Count Charles Victor Bertelsköld was sitting in the decorated summer-house, and in his garlanded arm chair. He had grown old. His once tall, erect figure was bowed, his dark hair had turned gray, his glance was feebler, his countenance paler. But there was still enough left of the once stately man fully to sustain his reputation as the chief magnate of the region. His bearing was, as ever, noble and gentle, and every time his glance fell on his wife, a brightening was seen which unmistakably disclosed how dearly he loved her, and how she had become the whole happiness of his life.

The summer-house was divided by green boughs into two parts, and the inner one, which formed a kind of bower, was in the beginning concealed. But scarcely had the count sat down, before the foliage in the middle was thrust aside, and within stood his eldest daughter, Baroness Louise, in the former costume of her grandmother, the Countess Eva, as court-lady to Princess Ulrica Eleanora. The illusion was all the more

perfect from the fact that the baroness bore a strong resemblance to her grandmother when young; and in order still more to revive the memory of that mother to whom the count had been so tenderly attached, a very natural life-size portrait of Countess Eva, in the same costume and garlanded with roses, adorned the background of the improvised bower.

A simple little congratulation in verse now followed, in which the deceased declared herself to have received permission once more to descend from her glorious heaven, to invoke blessing upon her beloved son, and the happiness of his declining years. There were only eight lines, but they were recited particularly well. A deceased mother, blessing her son in his daughter's form, and in his wife's presence,—this was so beautiful and touching a thought, it was so gathered into an image of everything that in life is precious to a human heart, that the object of this simple homage melted into tears. The count, who had been ignorant of the baroness' arrival late last evening, with the tenderest surprise arose. He embraced and kissed now his daughter and now his wife, who for him had brought about this happy event, and afterwards he did not weary of contemplating the two portraits of his mother, the painted and the living, while he compared the two, and felt his warm heart overflowing with memories and with love. The purest blessedness was reflected in his face. In his happiness nothing was lacking—nothing but the presence of the two sons.

"Will your grace buy some cranberries? We have nothing else this time of year," piped a childlike voice beside him, and there stood little Vera, garnished with garlands from top to toe. Not cranberries, however, but rare grapes, were what she offered, they having been conjured forth in the hot-house by Bergflygt, who had the whole winter been getting them ready for this occasion, and was not a little proud of his triumph.

The father lifted the little rogue in his arms, and

covered her with kisses. She too! There was not a cloud in his sky; but one was approaching—a little, floating cloud, which quickly vanished.

"Will you not offer berries to your sister?" asked the mother.

Vera went to the baroness, made a low courtesy, a little mockingly, perhaps, and said: "May it please you, madame?"

The countess flushed, but the baroness did not understand the thrust. She too was warm of heart, from her father's happiness, and replied: "You little forest fairy! It must be a rare forest which brings forth such cranberries!"

"My forest is gilded, like those they have at court," replied Vera, with a toss of her haughty head.

Louise drew her caressingly to her, and began to arrange her wild festoons of ten different kinds of leaves. It looked as though a confidential acquaintance was to arise between the two sisters. But the watchful eye of the countess observed that Vera purposely disarranged the beautiful festoons with which the baroness was draping her white clothes. There was something wrong, but no eye except the mother's observed it.

Thus, peaceful and glad, passed the afternoon. The company made an excursion in the park, and the count praised everything he saw. Bergflygt received honorable mention for the new plantings and the choice grapes. Louise was complimented for her tasteful toilet,—and she deserved it too, for with her the toilet was a matter of the greatest importance. Seldom had so elegant a lady of the world, so captivating a twenty-four-year-old baroness, waved her fan in Falkby Park.

In the relation between daughter and stepmother, no one could discover anything but friendship and confidence. The countess on her part did everything to meet her daughter half way, and she seemed to suc-

ceed. There was merriment, and there was the exchange of those little attentions which make intercourse agreeable. Only one little atom of love was still lacking to make everything as it should be.

The day was glorious and sunny. A long table for the poor was spread in the park, and the place of honor occupied by the octogenarian widow of the soldier Flinta, she who in such a peculiar manner had been connected with the fate of President Bertelsköld,—she with whom Countess Esther, fleeing, desperate, and benumbed with cold, had once found shelter in the cold winter night. Lady Vera said grace, and the countess herself went from place to place, from one poor person to another, to make sure that all received an abundance of what they needed. For each she had a friendly and encouraging word, and most of them knew her of old, for she had very often visited them in their cottages, and been a comforting angel to them in their distress. Grateful looks, therefore, also met her wherever she went. When she came to Flinta, the old woman was about to do as was usual on the large estates,—stoop down and kiss the countess's garments. But the countess was not one who would allow such a degrading demonstration of deference. She obliged the old woman to be seated, herself placed before her the delicious pease-porridge, and whispered in her ear: "Do you then want me to tell, in the presence of all, how I was once hungry and you gave me meat, how I was cold and you warmed me, how I was unhappy and you comforted me? You must of course allow me to recompense like with like, as well as I am able."

Tears ran down the old woman's withered cheeks. She tried to speak, but could only stammer forth: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

To Baroness Louise, this was not altogether unusual, for she had witnessed such scenes before. But the short, wide, flowing sleeves of her silken clothing did not allow her to touch the great dishes, or approach

the shabby guests of the table. She made one fleeting round, at a proper distance, and then went to cast another longing look toward the gate at the highway.

The count and countess were just about to return to the castle, to partake of their noonday meal, when a cloud of dust was seen on the highway. The gate opened, and in dashed first a courier on horseback, and a few minutes later a magnificent carriage drawn by four horses. In this carriage sat an elegant young gentleman, beside an old army officer.

All hastened to the steps, and Count Bertelsköld himself went to receive his long absent, and now so unexpectedly returned, eldest son. His fatherly heart beat with pride and delight. This meeting was the crowning joy of that festive day.

Lightly, but with much dignity, Count Bernhard leaped out of the carriage, and fell into his father's arms—also with much dignity. The young gentleman had come from Spain, but it would be unjust to him to regard him on that account as a Spanish grandee, who cannot possibly forget the ceremonious demands of etiquette, even when after a four years' absence he embraces a father. Count Bernhard was only a complete courtier and man of the world, who from his early childhood had been page to Prince Gustaf, and had continually afterward, first as gentleman of the bed-chamber, and later as diplomat, been in contact with many courts and the most select circles of society. His aristocratic bearing was therefore as unconstrained as second nature; his ceremonious dignity so easy, his courtesy so captivating, that, upon any other occasion whatever, the lack of that warmth and affection to be expected at such a meeting would scarcely have been observed. His father neither observed that, nor could he, in his delight, sufficiently rejoice his eyes with the sight of that brilliant, hopeful son who was to do honor to his name, cheer his old age, and some day ascend to the highest positions of honor.

For the young count had all those qualities which promise success in the world. A more attractive young man, of more striking appearance, Sweden did not possess. He was tall, like all his family; handsome, masculine, proud, knightly, intelligent and experienced. Wherever he made his appearance, he was regarded as a superior character; and from the hour when he arrived at Falkby, he was its acknowledged lord.

CHAPTER IV.

STEP-MOTHER AND STEP-SON.

THERE are opposites in life which are conscious of being drawn to each other, as by a kind of natural necessity; and there are resemblances which quite as necessarily must repel each other. The reason is, that no human being is complete, is alone sufficient in and for himself. Each needs to supply a deficiency in himself, but two equally strong characters are continually clashing like steel and flint.

Both Countess Esther and her step-son, Count Bernhard, were persons of great pride, strength and firmness of character. This was their resemblance, and the cause of their enmity—for that this existed, it was not difficult to guess. In this respect, neither required a complement, and therefore, when they met, it was with the repellence of two hard substances.

But the steel which rung in the character of Countess Esther was much more refined. It did not appear in sharp angles; it could be bent, and, like the spring of the watch, immediately resume its natural form. Shifting scenes, a rich experience, a loving heart, had taught that strong soul humility, renunciation, sacrifice. The steel lay hidden, but when it was touched it still rung,

and, like the tuning-fork, sounded the key-note of her being.

With Count Bernhard, the metal was finely polished, and shone like silver. But that smooth surface was brittle as quartz. Yielding and renunciation were arts which, in court drawing-rooms and the slippery sinuosities of diplomacy, his tongue, but never his heart, had learned. So long as everything bowed before his will, he could be good, amiable and affectionate; but every independent character was his natural enemy. And such a one he met in his step-mother. Countess Esther could sacrifice everything except her conviction of right. She could humble, but never humiliate herself. They were thus *compelled* to be enemies.

Though forced to coquette with the plebeian estates, the nobility of the time of liberty was scarcely less proud than had formerly been that of Queen Christina. The marriage of a count with a burgher's daughter was indeed no longer a thing unheard of, or forbidden by law; but still it continued to be a dark stain on a brilliant ancestral tree. This daughter of a burgher, this Finnish troll, had muddied the noble blood of the family, had crowded herself between father and son, had brought into the castle two new heirs, who, by half of their extraction, must be foreign to the full-blooded race. For less than this, might a young man hate his step-mother. And nothing,—no tenderness, no humility, no attempt to win his affection,—had been able to efface that hatred, which, for nineteen years, ever since his childhood, had been growing in the young count's soul, toward the base-born new-comer in his noble house.

Now, after four years' separation, they met again, and everything as yet seemed to be nothing but sunshine. Count Bernhard kissed his step-mother's hand, and she welcomed him with friendly words. Perhaps she still hoped that four years' ripened experience had succeeded in effacing those former impressions.

The dinner and the afternoon passed away in undisturbed harmony. Count Bernhard so wittily and so charmingly told about the strange lands and foreign courts which he had visited during his absence, that his father was delighted. Baroness Louise had never been in a more brilliant mood, and in wit and amiability vied with her brother. Little Vera was caressed, and half-conquered. Even the countess for a moment forgot her fears, and joined in the homage of all toward the distinguished and admired son of the house.

The company was augmented by a few neighboring old friends. The officer who had accompanied Count Bernhard in the carriage, and who was no other than Major Lejonram, the old gambler who thirty years ago had been Charles Victor Bertelsköld's second at the duel in the Spanish inn in the suburbs of Stockholm, laid claim to old acquaintance, and offered the countess his arm, while they made a promenade in the park.

"You live here like a queen, my most gracious countess," said Lejonram. "The Turks take me, but I would like to own your Falkby, only to be able to lay it at your feet as a tribute of my esteem. Unfortunately, I have always had good luck at raffling, but bad luck in love. My friend Charles has continually been beforehand with me. He has Falkby, he has you! Military contrivances always were his forte, and so he has founded an herbescent fortress to guard his treasure. A cursed pretty park! Here nothing is lacking for old hunters but a roe-buck!"

"If my uncle finds so much pleasure in these wretched tree-trunks, which resemble a crowd of peasants around a pulpit, it would probably not be impossible to improvise a roe-buck," said Count Bernhard, in a careless tone, as he walked immediately behind them, with his sister Louise on his arm. "José!" he added, to his Spanish *valet*, who was following with his cloak, "bring me my fowling-piece."

José bounded off, and in three minutes was back.

They had by this time approached the enclosure of the park, outside of which a few sheep, in their innocence, were grazing in the pasture.

"Behold the consequences of listening to Spanish romances!" said the father jestingly. "Bernhard sees roe-bucks where we others cannot discover anything but sheep."

"Have the kindness, my dear major!" said the young count, reaching him the gun. "You there see our game. It compares perfectly with the park. I beg you try your luck!"

"No, thank you," replied Lejonram. "That is more suitable for boys. You can try yourself, my fine sir! That is if your gracious mistress mother will allow it."

"My gracious mistress mother is always too gracious to deny us an innocent pleasure," responded Count Bernhard, who was probably irritated by Lejonram's politeness to his mother, and purposely sought an opportunity to show his superiority. At the same time, he grasped the gun and took sight.

The countess flushed, and remained silent; but Vera ran forward with a cry of terror.

"That is my Bijou!" she shrieked, as she seized her brother violently by the arm.

Bijou was the prettiest and most hopeful progeny of the barn-yard, white as cotton, given to Vera two weeks before, and the object of her liveliest admiration.

"Let it be!" exclaimed the father, but it was too late. The shot cracked, and little Bijou, which had not suspected any evil, made a high leap, and fell down bleeding on the green grass.

"*Fi donc!*" said Lejonram; "you might have left that to the butcher!"

"Bah!" responded Count Bernhard, in his light tone, but himself nonplussed by his rashness. "You ought to see a bull-fight, uncle!"

Vera was beside herself. She was carrying a hazel

whip in her hand, and she struck her brother across the arm.

"Your daughter, madame, is not well brought up," said Count Bernhard calmly, as he shook off the furious child.

The dark eyes of the countess flashed. She very well understood for whom the young count's ball was really intended. But she controlled herself, and, without a word in reply, had the weeping girl taken away.

Count Charles Victor was also displeased with this evil act, and tried to explain everything as a jest. He was not successful, and, in a discordant mood, the promenaders arrived at the summer-house. Here stood Bergflygt, cap in hand, with the secret hope of enjoying a new triumph for his successful arrangements.

"Ah!" said Count Bernhard, disdainfully, "is it you, Bergflygt? What kind of trash have you been stuffing in here, all by yourself? Know, my dear friend, you would do well to stick to turnips and carrots, for you have utterly bungled the park out of existence since I went away, and this little obstacle here, you know, looks like a hen-house. Where, in heaven's name, did you light upon such a ridiculous idea as to stick up leaves on the walls? Why, it resembles a name's-day celebration at an inn-parlor."

"It is all the command of her grace," replied the gardener, hurt to the very core by this unexpected compliment.

"Her grace is certainly enormously ingenious, and worthy so zealous a servant," responded the count in the same tone; "but that will not prevent your clearing away all this finery to-morrow. Besides, you are old and fussy, my friend; you will soon require a successor, do you understand?"

"I understand," said the deeply wounded man, "and I shall not wait for my dismissal, I shall ask it.

I have faithfully served their graces, the count and countess, for thirty-five years, and no one has ever yet called me a bungler at my business."

"Really? Well, since there must be a first time, allow me to do you that justice."

"Stop. Your mother and I think a great deal of that honest fellow," impatiently interposed Count Charles Victor, in French.

"You, father? That is another matter. Then I shall pardon the poor fool. He has many merits. I believe he has been betrothed to you, madame!"

The last words were uttered in a tone so low that only the countess heard them; but she had heard enough.

CHAPTER V.

LIGHTNING IN THE THUNDER-CLOUD.

THERE is no victory so difficult, no supremacy so costly, as the victory and supremacy over self. An insulted man can kill his antagonist, an irritated woman can thrust him through with words sharper than daggers; but to keep still, keep still with a wounded heart, silent and weaponless, that is more than any man and more than most women can do.

Countess Esther remained silent.

It was a glorious June evening. The dew was falling, the grass glittering, the cuckoo singing, and the young leaves in the park were resplendent with beauty. The sea was quite near, and lay like molten silver in the glow of evening. An expedition by boat was now undertaken.

Count Bernhard when a boy, had owned a sail-boat called "The Dolphin," which he had loved almost as dearly as his horse. For many years past, the Dolphin

had lain drawn up into the boat-house, hidden and forgotten; but the countess, to give her step-son a pleasure, had had the old sloop put in order and repainted. It was now lying at the shore, prettier than ever, its pennant fluttering in the gentle breeze, and its mast twined about with flowers.

"The Dolphin begs the honor of once more bearing her master across the sea," said the countess, as merrily as if never an unfriendly word had disturbed her heart's peace.

Count Bernhard fixed on his step-mother a pair of astonished eyes, looked at the sloop, looked again at the countess, and calmly replied: "Why, that is no boat,—that is a peasant bride!"

"What!" exclaimed the father, "do you not recognize your old Dolphin? Well, I admit that the Doge of Venice may possibly travel more splendidly in his gilded galley; but being in East Gothland, I think the Dolphin ought to give satisfaction It was your mother, Bernhard, who for your sake remembered the old relic. I had long since forgotten that any such thing existed."

"With your permission, father," replied the son, "I prefer to take passage in a boat of less finery and safer planks. I have traveled too much on the sea to sail with flowers. Come, Louise!" and he reached his hand to his sister, to board a larger boat, lying near, while the rest entrusted their lives to the distrusted planks of the Dolphin.

The boats directed their course to the widow Flinta's little cottage, which was situated on the other side of the bay. The course was not happily chosen, for Count Bernhard, as long ago as his last visit to Falkby, had wished to have the cottage torn down, in order to erect a shooting-box there, as the forest in that region was rich in game. At that time his step-mother had succeeded in saving the poor widow's shelter; and this, Count Bernhard had not forgotten.

Scarcely had he landed and seen the old woman sitting on the steps with her knitting, before he said to his father, in his ordinary careless tone, as he pointed to the cottage:

"Next week we will have that torn down, father."

And, without waiting for an answer, he added, as he turned to the old woman:

"You can get ready to move to-morrow."

"But that is hard on the old woman. We will reflect on the matter!" responded the father, somewhat embarrassed by that over-assured tone.

But the widow, under the burden of her eighty years, was still a soldier's wife, and not at all inclined to accept the situation as decided.

"Am I to move to-morrow?" she asked.

"Yes, my old woman, for to-night it is somewhat late, and we will grant you your night's rest," replied Count Bernhard.

"I move! I, who have lived here more than forty years!" burst out the old woman. "And for what am I to move?"

"Because it so pleases your gracious lord. He needs the place."

"Has he not forest and field, as far as the eye can see? Is there not room for his grace in great, wide Falkby, without driving me away from my poor cottage?"

"My dear old woman, you need exercise; you can walk a little, and then you will sleep better," mockingly replied the young count, who plainly perceived that every word was to his step-mother a pin-prick in the heart.

"Must I go? And where am I to go?" bewailed the old woman, beside herself with surprise.

"On the town, my dear old woman," jeeringly replied Count Bernhard. "You have it too monotonous—you need change."

"I go on the town," and the inconsolable old woman wrung her hands.

Count Charles Victor blushed for the heartlessness of his son. He secretly resolved to let the widow remain, but meantime joined the rest of the company in order not to allow any new discord to disturb the comfort of the evening. The countess alone had heard the last mocking words.

She now advanced, took the old woman kindly by the hand, and said: "Do you not see that the young count wants to frighten you merely for amusement? No, my dear old woman, you shall never need to go on the town, nor shall you move from your humble cottage as long as you live."

"Do you believe that, madame?" said Count Bernhard, incisively.

"I am very sure of it," calmly replied the countess.

"*Nous verrons;* we shall see."

"I shall never see that, nor you either. You cannot be in earnest."

"If I never have been in earnest, be assured I shall be now," responded the young count, as he lowered his voice even to a whisper. "You have so long been ruler at Falkby, madame, that you have altogether forgotten your real position. You ought, nevertheless, to remember *who you have been* and *who you are*, madame. You blanch? So much the better. If it should trouble you to be so claimless, I shall be compelled to remind you of it. I protest that, for my father's sake, I do it very unwillingly; but you should remember that a person like you ought never, in your place, to esteem herself for more than her birth will bear."

Countess Esther really had turned pale, but only for a moment. She immediately regained that admirable composure which had so many times rescued her in her eventful life. She looked her antagonist fixedly in the eye, and calmly replied:

"If I blanched, it was because I now see clearly the calamity I have so long guessed, and which is to embitter the life of a whole family. Bernhard, my friend, my son,—for thus, against your will, I must still call you—has it then really gone so far, that no respect for your father, no sympathy for his happiness or love for your younger brother and sister, can efface from your heart that hatred which I have not deserved? You very well know that it was not I who crowded myself into this family. You ought also to know that I never have done, and never shall do, any dishonor to your house. Why, then, will you rend this bond which to you ought to be sacred? Why will you hate me, who have never shown you anything but love? Why do you speak thus to me, whom you cannot insult without insulting your father?"

"You talk like a book, madame," responded Count Bernhard, "but you once more forget that the question is not as to your *rank*, but as to your *power*. Of course I am willing to grant you all rights,—I kiss your hand; you shall be called your grace; and it ought to flatter you, I think, for you were once satisfied with less. You have your happy position, need have no care for anything but to amuse yourself, dress, listen to compliments, and be idolized by my father, who really is so fond of you that he has become half plebeian. In a word, I think you ought to content yourself with that, and not try to rule in a house where you have once been chamber-maid. If my father is weak, madame, you ought to understand that I am by no means so compliant. You ought to call to mind, from some reading-book for children, which you have perhaps studied in Vasa, the well-known words of Gustavus Vasa, that 'there is not room for your grace and my grace under the same roof.' Be modest, madame; it would be indescribably becoming to you, and I do not see what should hinder our afterward associating as friends. Why should I hate you? People hate

only their equals. The rest—they shake off, when they become too presumptuous."

Sorrowfully the countess smiled.

"That is enough. I have already heard more than I ought to hear. I cannot answer you here, but we must come to an understanding—and we must do so soon."

"God save Carolus!" was at that moment heard from the shore, in the somewhat tipsy voice of Lejonram, and the friends emptied a glass of Hungarian wine to the birthday of the host.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FAREWELL.

THE sun had set, the little fireworks had been displayed on the lawn, the guests, after a cheery evening, scattered, and no one surmised the dark cloud which had gathered over the happiness of the family—no one except those two whom it most nearly touched, and even of them only one knew how to estimate its whole significance.

When they were alone, Countess Esther took her husband's hand and said: "I have a request to make of you!"

"What can you ask that I am not immediately glad to grant?" inquired the count.

"A renunciation," she replied.

"I consent unconditionally. For your sake, I can renounce everything except yourself."

"But suppose, now, that I was to ask that very thing of you?"

The count regarded her with an upbraiding look.

"That you can never ask," he replied.

For a long time she was silent. Her heart was too full.

"Would you miss me much if I—for example, made a long journey?" she at length asked.

"That is impossible. Why should you make a journey?"

"I might have an important reason, you know. For example, if it concerned the happiness of us all?"

"Good heavens! Are you sick? If you need to use the baths at Spaa or Pyrmont, only say the word and I will go with you!"

"Give yourself no uneasiness; I am perfectly well. But suppose that nevertheless I must leave you for a while. Will you promise me to bear this pain with calmness?. We shall see each other again, you know!"

"But, my darling, I do not understand you!" exclaimed the count, seriously disturbed.

"Next to yourself, it is Vera's training which gives me most anxiety," continued the countess, without appearing to observe the cloud which lay on the brow of her husband. "I would not like to leave her to Louise. Louise is fond of her, I am convinced of that; but we view the world very differently. It is my desire that Vera shall be brought up in unostentatious seriousness, in simple manners, in unfeigned piety. So I have been thinking that we ought to choose her a governess to our minds. What do you say of Lady Sjöblad? She is a poor but well-bred girl, over twenty years of age, of birth sufficient to be able to appear in your drawing-room, but plain, good, sensible and pious. Her mother, I recollect, was from the common people. Shall we write to her to-morrow?"

"Do as you wish; I have nothing against it. Your eyes, my Esther, see more clearly than mine, and I have always done well by following your counsel. But, for heaven's sake, explain what you really mean by these dark questions."

"To-morrow you shall find out. And now, good-

night, you the beloved of my youth, the friend of my life! Do you love me yet, my Charles?"

"I ought to punish you for such a question by answering you—no!"

"Yes, you love me! Then do not be angry at your wife if she sometime gives you sorrow. God, the Omniscient, knows that I would a hundred times buy your happiness with the sacrifice of my own. Good-night! Remember my request concerning Vera! Be a father to our Paul, for he needs love in life! And keep me always in dear remembrance, my Charles!"

Unable longer to control herself, at these words she leaned against her husband's shoulder, kissed his gray hair, and bathed his cheeks with her tears. Deeply moved, he folded her in his arms. His eyes were also moistened, he knew not why.

"No," said he, "I cannot let you go, before you have confided to me that which so affects you. Tell it to me!"

"Do not ask me now. Everything, everything, you know, is to be made clear, and I have promised that in the morning you shall know it," replied the countess, as she hastily wiped away her tears, and showed him a calm, almost smiling countenance, beaming with affection. Never in the stateliest beauty of her youth had she been more beautiful than now.

"Good-night!" she once more whispered; and, as though fearful of her own tenderness if she lingered longer, hurried away.

She went to her daughter's sleeping-room. Vera, in her pretty little bed of walnut, with red curtains, was sleeping the sleep of innocence. The mother stooped above the sleeping child and pressed upon her lips a burning kiss.

"What am I about to do?" she moaned, wringing her hands. "How is it possible, how is it possible to abandon you, my child, whom God Almighty has given

me to cherish and answer for? And yet it must be, though my heart break. But give me a sign, my God, give me a sign that I am not acting wrongly, and without hesitation I will submit to thy will!"

Breathless and anxious she waited, waited long. There was no sound save the gentle breathing of the sleeping child, which like a sweet whisper broke the silence of the room. Then the lips of the little one moved, and, sorrowing still in her dreams, she said: "My Bijou!"

The mother's countenance brightened. "Thank you, protecting angel of my child!" she softly added. "I now understand you. That ball which was aimed at your mother's heart shall no more, as to-day, slay your innocent joy. Farewell! God's holy angels bless and guard you, my beloved child!"

With that silent prayer, she softly stole away and shut herself into her own room, there still to "counsel with her Lord and God," as she had of old learned from her pious sister Veronica, now long since deceased.

It was from Veronica that Vera had been named, though that name had been somewhat shortened.

Count Charles Victor Bertelsköld spent a sleepless, restless night. In his wife he was not accustomed to finding a trace of feminine caprices. That strong, superior, and yet humble woman had long ago learned the difficult art of controlling herself, and still she now seemed to be fallen from her glorious equipoise. Why? He did not know. In vain did he seek to divine an explanation. More than once he was upon the point of rising from his bed, hurrying to her, and once more begging her to confide everything to him. But it was night—she was asleep, and she had promised him an explanation; ought he not, with his patient waiting, to give her a new proof of his unlimited confidence?

Scarcely, however, had the early summer morning

dawned, and the first step of the servant girl, who was putting the adjoining drawing-room in order after the festival of yesterday, been heard, before the count arose and on tip-toe glided to his wife's room, which was in the second story, and from the count's room was approached by a narrow spiral staircase of iron. He found it empty. The countess's bed stood untouched. A bureau drawer was drawn out, and was empty. Count Bertelsköld's heart beat quicker. A strange undefined fear took possession of his soul. "Perhaps she has gone out into the park," thought he, to calm himself.

He looked for her in the park. She was not there. Returning to the castle, he avoided questioning the domestics that no one might observe his anxiety. Neither did any one utter a word about the countess. It was probably supposed that she had gone out on one of those early morning walks, when she made solitary visits to the sick and poor. Now, however, arose in the count's memory those inexplicable and significant words she had spoken to him yesterday when they separated. Terrible forebodings convulsed his heart. Pale, but without disclosing to any one his paralyzing fear, he again sped up to the countess's room.

On her writing-table he now found a sealed letter, which in his first confusion he had not observed. It was addressed to him. With trembling hand he opened it and read:

"My Beloved:—Read these lines with calmness, and read them alone! Be a man, my Charles, and the omnipotent God, who tries us, shall give you courage to live without your wife.

"You, my dear Charles, have never failed to appreciate me, never misunderstood me. You, who have been nothing but tenderness and confidence toward me,—for which, as long as my heart beats, I shall be grateful to you,—you know that I have never striven after your rank, your name, your wealth, but only your love. But do you remember what I once said to you in my father's garden, when you asked my hand? It was a misfortune, I said, that we had not been united in our youth. We might then have broken our way through walls of ice. Since then, we have had

neither the power nor the right to recreate the world. Between us now stood two who had older claims on you, and those two children were a world between us. They were obliged to see with the eyes of their age,—to think the prejudices of their time, and therefore I cannot blame them, or cherish the least enmity toward them, for not possessing clearer vision and loftier thoughts than the whole generation in which they lived. I have honestly tried to fulfill toward them a mother's duty. I had long hoped that my love would at last break down that wall which the prejudice of birth had erected between us. But I have deceived myself. How should one weak woman be able to change that world which so many wise thinkers have not had the power to restore to equality between man and man! Your elder children, my Charles, must therefore always look down on the humble woman whom you have elevated to be their mother. But then if that humble mother had been able to give up all her own claims to deference and forbearance, and had allowed herself to be trampled in the dust, she would not have been worthy to be called your wife. Her honor is yours, and her own children shall some day know that they may not despise their mother.

"I have, therefore, my beloved, in this hard struggle between two duties, been compelled to sacrifice the one. Forgive me, precious friend, that, in order not to lose your esteem, my own, and that of my children, I give you up! With me, every dissension, every discord disappears from this house. The humble burgher-daughter returns to the unobserved place which she ought never to have abandoned, and shall never cease to invoke blessing upon you and all your house. Do not let the world into our domestic sorrows. Say that I have gone abroad for my health. Neither seek to spy out whither I flee; for my resolve is fixed. But I cannot live without knowing that I am still lovingly remembered by you, and therefore I shall sometimes write to you and our children, and kiss with tears the lines you send to me. Be happy, beloved of my soul! O that I could be your wife without blushing in the presence of your children! Remember me to my Paul, my Vera! Remember me also to Bernhard and Louise, and beg them, for my love's sake, to forgive me all the sorrow I have given you. ESTHER LARSSON, once Countess Bertelsköld."

"Father," said Count Bernhard, who at that moment entered, "will you please come down? My brother Paul has just arrived, together with his mentor, a somewhat over-studied person, who calls himself Eric Ljung."

"Paul! At this moment! What shall I answer him when he asks for his mother?"

CHAPTER VII.

THE SONG OF THE PASTURE-GIRL.

A DAY is to the Lord as a thousand years, and to nations as fifty. Their day goes by, their evening comes, like those of all others. And some morning, when they awake, they find, with astonishment, everything new.

On the dial-plate of the time of liberty in the North, the hand pointed toward the eleventh hour of the day, and, while many still believed it standing in its noonday sunshine, its long, stormy day was nearly past. Only here and there stood a watchman in some high tower, where the eye was not obscured by human endeavor, and, full of anxious expectation, heeded the meaning of the signs.

They were plain enough for those who would understand, and yet they were not understood. Not long could it possibly remain as it now was. The realm was sick with internal dissension, and, beneath the thin paint on the cheeks, the countenance of Time was seen as pale as death. The one arm was wrestling with the other; whither the one foot wished to go, the other would not. The one eye looked and the one ear listened toward the left, while the other eye and ear were turned toward the right. Every nerve was over-excited, but every muscle was lax from weariness. Unevenly beat the heart, and every evil passion seemed to have ascended to the head and dimmed the eyes. The northern lion, in his old age, was transformed to a hydra, with five hundred heads instead of one, and all those heads were biting and rending each other.

Why was all this? Was liberty then so great a mis-

fortune that better days could dawn only above its grave? No; liberty—true liberty—is the health and happiness of nations, their earthly goal, their highest condition of life, without which no lasting prosperity, no true development, exists. But in liberty everything depends on its moral basis. Build it upon morality, and, like fire, it will warm and illuminate. Remove it from that foundation, and, like fire, it will burn and destroy. Liberty is like the air, whose invisible masses are continually struggling for equipoise. Where the equilibrium is disturbed, storms arise. It was because liberty had departed from its moral foundation that the time of liberty in Sweden and Finland fell, and at the same time it had thus insensibly passed beyond its mark, and turned to its opposite. Because the golden goblet of the realm, having been made to rest on two feet, was balanced on one, the time of liberty fell.

Late one evening in June, in the year 1771, two men were walking under the oaks and chestnuts in the park of Ekolsund.

The elder of them was a tall, stately gentleman of about fifty years, clad with evident and almost scrupulous care, in the court costume of that time, who defied the liberty of country life itself, and deferentially listened to the words of the younger, while a cloud of anxiety seemed to darken his high forehead. When he sometimes uttered a few words in reply, they were short and measured, as though according to rule, but his words were those of the tried statesman, and betokened at once a clear judgment and an imperturbable calmness.

The younger of the two was only twenty-five years of age, and also wore a motley costume, according to the French fashion of that time. Over the short black small-clothes of velvet, tied with red ribbons, the yellow silken vest and the blue velvet coat, he had carelessly thrown a short Spanish cloak of black cloth. He wore a lace neck-cloth and cuffs, a wig, a hair-bag,

and a three-cornered hat, but all those with the most unconstrained and agreeable elegance, and he spoke with the most animated, expressive gestures, as he now hastened his steps, now abruptly stopped, now took his attendant's arm, now again withdrew, and gesticulated with his hands, as though he needed all these eloquent signs to complement the poverty of language. In his handsome, frank, intelligent countenance, every muscle incessantly played, in the most varying expression, and the large, lustrous, blue eyes, in particular, had a wonderful power of reflecting every shade of the feelings within him, just as the tranquil sea by turns reflects sunshine and clouds. And yet it was said of those eyes that they were just as impenetrable as expressive, just as enigmatical as captivating, for such was the whole personality of this young man. Nature had formed him open as the light of day, but life had made of him a sealed book. He had grown up in a time of many intrigues, and was so continually surrounded by secret enemies, that dissimulation with him became a necessity, studied from his earliest childhood, and never was a more thoroughly veiled mind concealed beneath an apparently more artless sincerity.

Still there were moments when that concealed heart became clear to the few initiated who had the rare confidence of looking within it. It was the king's former tutor, Count Scheffer, before whom Gustaf III. was now, in such a moment, opening three-fourths, if not the whole, of his heart. The situation lay clear before them both; they surveyed it like a chess-board, on which the king, on all sides surrounded by antagonists in power or ambitious of power, could not stir without setting his crown and perhaps his life at stake. Compelled to remain immovable, that position slowly but surely would also cost him his crown, and the only means of extrication was to set other pieces in motion, in order by degrees to make for the royal chess-man freer playing-room and more independence.

Surrounded, flattered, admired by all that Paris possessed that was gay, talented and brilliant, the young king had three months ago received the message of his father's sudden death, and his own heavy and powerless crown. Afterward he had hastened to assure himself of the sympathy and support of Louis XV.; without hesitation he had subscribed the royal assurance which the Swedish council made haste to lay before him; on his way back, he had visited his celebrated and dangerous uncle, King Frederick, in Potsdam, and he now stood prepared to open the Swedish Diet, where his implacable enemies, the Caps, after their defeat two years before, had regained power, and where Russia and England, with full hands, were scattering money, in order to hinder every attempt to uplift the country out of its deep debasement.

Concerning all this the king had been counseling with his confidant, and the situation was so desperate that no other salvation seemed possible than unconditionally to humiliate himself under the parties' word of command. They had been speaking of trying to mediate between the parties, as a beginning, and flattering the exasperated Caps with a few places in the council.

This was to begin his reign with a bitter humiliation, so much the bitterer as the Caps required censure against the late king's advisers. The young king's cheeks glowed with indignation.

"Ah!" said he, with a gesture of despair, "is there in all the world a more unhappy king than he who has no choice but to blush in his own presence, or to devote his country to destruction?"

"Yes, sire," replied Count Scheffer, with dignity, "there is one still more unhappy, and that is he who is obliged to submit to both."

"That is true," responded the king more calmly. "My kingdom lies powerless, my crown totters in every breeze, and yet I would not exchange Sweden for Poland, nor my crown for that of Stanislas. A third

means exists, and I still possess an independent choice."

"I venture to doubt that," said the count.

"What? If all my efforts miscarry, if I foresee the fate of Stanislas, can I not abdicate?"

"Your majesty knows better than I, that the fate of Sweden would then infallibly become that of Poland."

"*Soit.* My honor will be saved in the eyes of posterity."

"No honor for your majesty will surpass that of having rescued your kingdom."

"Do you think so?" thoughtfully asked the king. "Alas, my dear count, a wretched Cap is at this moment worth more than my whole crown!"

The two who were conversing had now approached the enclosure of the park, and before Count Scheffer had time to reply, the cheery song of a pasture-girl was heard, as she was driving her cows along the pathway from the pasture. The gentlemen listened. It was one of those melodious ballads which so often, in Sweden, play, as it were, in leafy tree-tops:

"When I am a bride, and am wearing the crown,
In roses some day,
Oh, finely I'll dance in my garlanded gown,
Then I shall be gay!

"My crown shall be splendid with leaves all bedight,
And roses that day;
And never a crown was with beauty so bright,—
Oh, I shall be gay!

"The laddies may dance, but they'll ne'er dance me down,
In roses that day,
And never a troll get my garlands or crown,—
Oh, I shall be gay!"

"Behold there a prophecy!" said Count Scheffer, jestingly.

"Yes, verily," replied King Gustaf with a smile. "I, too, shall take care that no one dances me down, and then I hope the troll will not get my crown."

CHAPTER VIII.

A COUNTRY AT AUCTION.

ON the thirteenth of June, 1771, the opening of the diet was announced in Stockholm, with the sound of trumpets and kettle-drums, and every one prepared, if not to make himself deserving of his country, at least to earn something by it.

The same day the burghers and peasants were to elect their speakers.

Jonas Bertila, the young representative from Storkyro, had just risen, and sat immersed in the reading of his morning chapter in the Bible, when some one knocked at the door of his humble room in the southern suburb, and in stepped a young deputy district judge, private secretary of Baron Höpken, leader of the Hats.

"Is this Representative Bertila?" inquired the curled gentleman, with insinuating tone.

"Yes. In what way can I be of service?"

"I only wish to ask after your health, representative, as you were not in the company last evening at the Red Cock inn. The most of the honorable house of peasants were present, and discoursed the good of the kingdom over a mug of the best Rostocker ale which has yet been emptied for the good cause. I suppose, representative, you know the business; Eric Anderson is being voted for, and the cash consideration is a hundred plåts, of which I here beg to relieve myself."

"What is that for?" inquired the young and as yet inexperienced representative, when his be-curled guest,

without further ceremony about so natural and usual a matter, began to count out his package of bills on the table.

The elegant gentleman misunderstood the question. "The amount is not as large, it is true, as my superior would wish, and a man of such great influence might expect," he resumed, without the least embarrassment, "but the times are close, and you may be assured, representative, that at the first opportunity you shall be especially remembered. Confidentially speaking, we have the king and liberty on our side! So Eric Anderson will be the choice; I suppose that is decided?"

"Yes, certainly, I have been thinking of voting for Eric Anderson, but neither you, sir, nor anybody else, need to blow it in my ears," responded honest Jonas, whose stolid Finnish blood began at last to boil. "What do you want to do, sir, with those wretched rags of bills? Are you thinking of buying my vote, sir?"

"I guessed immediately that it was too little. The Finnish rascal requires higher pay than I thought, but we have got to keep him in good humor, for he can influence the others!" thought the negotiator of the Hats, with secret vexation, as, with somewhat more ceremony than before, he drew forth another package of notes. "I am sure that all of the honorable peasants from Finland will vote, as you do, Representative Bertila, for the good cause," added the gentlemen, as he significantly flapped the notes against the table.

That was pretty intelligible. Bertila had come, with a rare innocence indeed, into that great broker-establishment called the diet, but he would have been a complete blockhead if he had not understood such an eloquent language of signs. He had also gradually found time to form a resolution, and the result was that he grasped the fine gentleman by the arm, led him to the door, and threw the bundles of bills after him, down stairs.

"There you have your rags, sir!" exclaimed the enraged peasant after him. "Another time you can be ashamed of yourself, sir, when you speak to free peasants, sir!'

"The devil is to pay, because I did not have gold coin!" growled the attorney of the Hats, with displeasure, during his passage down stairs. "The times are getting worse and worse, and these peasant-clowns are every day becoming more insolent. Once they could be got to dance a fandango for a mug of ale. Now, it does not at all do to stuff them with bank-notes as full as sausages; it must forsooth be a silver tankard, or a bracelet for mother, or a purse of genuine ducats! I am very sure the Caps got there first, and let the stupid Finn hear the jingle. He will vote for our opponent, that is as clear as the day, and that is what the king is getting for being so niggardly with his farthings."

"If that is the honesty of the Hats, they may go to the deuce," thought Jonas Bertila, on his part, as he sat down to scrape off his beard, in honor of the day, with a razor manufactured in his own smithy. "Well, then I shall think that the Caps are decent folks, and do not creep forward to their mark by roundabout ways. I shall go over to the Caps; then we poor peasants will at least be able to live in peace from the Russians."

No sooner had he arrived at this (as he thought) wise resolve, when some one again knocked at his door, and this time with a considerably rougher fist. The door was opened, and in shuffled an ex-member of the house of peasants, who, after his farm had gone under the hammer, had set up a distillery on General Sechlin's estate, and was accustomed to running errands for the leaders of the Caps, to old friends in the house of peasants. The man was a rude fellow, of the very sort to impose on the peasants with a large share of audacity, which was intended to represent a straightforward

manner, and an unparalleled impudence, meant to pass for business practicality.

"Well, how does the world use you, old man?" said the worthy deputy, throwing himself into the other painted wooden chair, for there were only two in the room. "Good as to health and better as to cash? What the devil, Bertila! I believe you are sleeking up! Let your beard grow, old man, then you can grumble in it, and leave that smooth chin to the king's darlings. We are free peasants, and do not know how to put our words into flourishes, and our faces must pass for what they are worth. Are you in the habit of taking a dram in the morning? For my part, I prefer Swedish ale."

"Who are you?" inquired Bertila, who had never seen the fellow before, and did not feel particularly flattered by his obtrusiveness.

"Who am I? What a question! That sounds as though you were a newly-fledged dieter. Everybody else in Sweden knows honest old Hallberg, who has never put on any ceremony for high or low. But it is all the same. If you want a friend you can depend on, and who is peasant, body and soul, just speak the word. Why did you not come to The Sun inn yesterday? We peasants were talking over the good of the kingdom there in a way that made the wind whistle. They shall sing a different tune, you will see; and we are thinking now of stuffing the king into our right boot, and the lords into our left. We intend to vote for Joseph Hansson, from the province of Elfsborg,—he is a true man, and that is why he was voted out of the house two years ago, when the Hats were feeding us with French confectionery. I'll bet a fat pig for next Christmas that you think as I do. They are poor as grasshoppers, and it is a mere nothing they offer us; but an honest fellow deserves his day's wages, that is my catechism, and you shall have yours, Bertila. What do you say to fifty plåts? That would buy you

a fine ox, and a silk handkerchief besides, so you would be welcome at mother's."

"Fifty plåts?" replied Jonas, who now began to understand which way the conversation leaned. "There was a gentleman here just now who offered a hundred."

"Counterfeit notes!—nothing but counterfeit notes! Depend upon it, Bertila, as true as I am a peasant, body and soul. Well, I suppose you were sensible enough to give him a passport down stairs?"

"Yes, that is what I did."

"Didn't I say so? You are a jewel of a representative, and, for that, you shall have seventy plåts, genuine current money, which you will not be hung for."

"For what good deed?"

"For what? For your honesty, your ability, and because you side with the good of the country."

"But suppose it should not occur to me to sell my vote?"

"If? Well, you are a comical knot, Bertila. See here, I will tell you something confidentially. You shall have a hundred plåts, on the condition that you do not speak of it to any living soul. What do you say of that, eh?"

"For shame! I am no thief!"

"Indeed! If you sing that song, it will be to your own injury. You may let thieves and rascals rule the kingdom, for all me. I speak my mind plainly, and advise you as a friend. It can't be you mean to ask a hundred and fifty? There are plenty of others here who mean well by their country. And then I will whisper something in your ear: the king is on our side! What do you think of that? Doesn't it beat the devil? Well, let her slide for a hundred and fifty, since you have got so much Finnish in you!"

"Is the auction over now?" inquired Bertila, as he laid away his razor, and threateningly arose.

"What a Turk you are to me!" responded the

negotiator, who had again misunderstood his meaning, and with a grimace put his hand into his breast pocket. "Really, old man, are you not a little unreasonable? But if you will not take less, and will promise to deserve it, then—call it two hundred! That is my last offer, as true as I am peasant, soul and body."

"And as true as I am peasant, body and soul, I will teach you how an honest fellow answers such villainous wiles!" responded Bertila, as he seized the fellow by the collar, and threw him heels over head down stairs.

"Cursed Finn!" muttered the negotiator, rubbing his back. "That is only because the Hats have offered him two hundred and fifty!"

"I perceive that the Caps and Hats can shake hands with each other!" said Bertila disdainfully. "My poor country!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE HIGHEST OFFER.

FULL of indignation, Jonas Bertila called on his relative, Thomas Larsson, grandson of the burgher king, and, after the resignation of Grönberg, representative for the town of Wasa. An hour or two still remained before the members were to assemble for voting, and the young peasant wanted to hear the opinion of the burgher.

Thomas Larsson was a stiff, reticent man of forty, and, like his father and grandfather, a merchant from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot. Like all his family, he was active, industrious and shrewd, and therefore not inclined to be lavish with his father's wealth; but that vein of iron which had hitherto gone through the family, and in the grandfather had har-

dened to the most highly tempered steel, had in the last two generations begun to soften. Nothing ill was known of Thomas Larsson, more than of other wealthy magnates of provincial towns, at whom envy liked to peck; but it was believed that he was not as invulnerable to bribes as the state of his finances might have allowed him to be, and it was therefore not without hesitation that Jonas set out for the abode of this second cousin, to ask counsel of him.

"Do as you like," said the cautious merchant. "I am going to vote for the Caps. Our family have been Caps for fifty years, and for that reason I was elected."

"Did you get paid for it?" inquired Jonas, gloomy of heart.

"Paid or not, I shall vote for the one I think best."

"And you have the conscience to accept Russian money!"

"Or English," responded Thomas, with a coarse laugh. "It is not very exactly known; it smells neither of sole-leather nor stone coal. It would not injure your business to be less hypocritical. If you do not take it, some one else will. The money comes into the realm, and that is the main thing."

"Is that the main thing? For what then do you estimate the honor and welfare of the nation! For what do you estimate your own conscience?"

The merchant impatiently shook his head. "That is the way of it when boys are sent to the diet!" he growled. "Phrases, and again phrases, and nothing but phrases! The honor of the nation! The welfare of the country! All that sounds very nice, but we have a chance to hear the same from morning till night, from every scoundrel, whether he calls himself Hat or Cap. My conscience is ten years older than yours, and when you get to be ten years older, you will learn to look out for the good of the country and your finances at the same time."

With this, the young peasant went to the assembly room of the representatives of his rank, and, behold, the fairest speeches, about the good of the realm, the true welfare of the country, and the duties of citizens, here and there interlarded, as occasion required, with illusory remarks about enlarged privileges for the honorable house of peasants, were really made! All the speakers used the same phrases, only with the difference that the friends of the Hats represented the Caps as the basest traitors who had ever beheld the light of day, while the Caps, on their part, protested that all misfortune of the realm came from the malicious Hats, and that the country would never have tranquillity until those monsters were utterly exterminated. Honest Jonas Bertila was filled with shame and disgust, for he knew that all those speeches had been written in the invisible court of the leaders. He now knew that all, or almost all, of those vociferous friends of country had sold their patriotism for cash, the simplest for fifty plåts, and the more cunning for a hundred, a hundred and fifty, or two hundred, according to their skill in extorting it from the negotiators who had taken the job of furnishing this or that number of votes, and had their lawful profit on everything that they could bargain for.

The hostile parties seemed in the beginning to be of about equal strength,—that is to say, equally well salaried. But it soon apeared that the Caps paid the more liberally, and at the voting they thus conquered, by eighty-four to sixty-one. Jonas Bertila had belonged to the minority. He did not like the Hats, but he liked the Caps still less.

The result was the same in the house of burghers. The Caps were victorious with seventy-two to fifty-five. Never had the parties been more shameless, or more boldly made use of every possible means to take victory by force. With lavish hands, English and Russian ministers poured out gold to secure the success of the

Caps; and the French minister, the patron of the Hats, vainly turned his whole purse inside out. While Madam Du Barry's lap-dog was wearing a collar of jewels, her lord's minister, Baron Vergennes, had not over a paltry two hundred thousand francs to feed the voracious members of the diet, and King Gustaf was obliged to borrow of Vergennes! The kingdom of Sweden was set up at auction to the highest bidder, and General Pechlin ventured mockingly to tell the king to his face that bribes were the best defence of liberty.

And now the clergy were to choose their speaker. They were few in number, and therefore most expensive to buy. But a fourth of the power was theirs, so why should they sell their country for a song? These holy men, whose kingdom, however, ought not to be of this world, sold themselves with so much skill that their table, for a long time afterward, sunk beneath silver, as their bodies beneath the burden of their stomachs.

A strange providence had ordained that members of the Larsson family, at this diet, sat in all three of the untitled parliamentary bodies—Bertila in the house of peasants, Thomas Larsson in the house of burghers, and, among the clergy, his uncle, Provost Bertel Larsson, younger son of the burgher-king. To this prelate went Jonas Bertila, the day before the election of speaker. It had been with Jonas as with many another in stormy times—he had determined not to belong to any party, and yet little by little had been compelled to attach himself to one or the other of the combatants. By way of experiment he, like others, had been a Hat; and now went to the provost, who was his mother's cousin, to ask advice of that esteemed man, whom Jonas from childhood had heard spoken of as a model in his rank.

Provost Larsson, however, was as perfect an opposite to his pious daughter, Cecilia, as a stomach of earthly dust can be to an eye of heavenly luster. He was a gigantic old man of sixty-two, bland and smiling

beneath the bushy eyebrows, and very devout, when occasion required, but never thinking of anything except his own advantage. He was now representative for the third time, and it had cost him round sums to his brethren in rank at home, but that, too, was an affair which he knew how to manage with marked adroitness. When the envoy of the Hats offered him five hundred plåts, he merely shrugged his shoulders and declared that he had not had any temporal gain in view, but intended to vote for the Caps, after which the offer was gradually raised to three thousand five hundred plåts, which were counted out in cash on his table, and with the most maidenlike mien were swept into the large till. The provost was then at last convinced that the Hats were right. And when, the day afterwards, the messenger of the Caps came to offer him a cash consideration of equal weight, Provost Larsson declared, in accordance with his new principles, that he would by no means have any ill-earned pelf, as his conscience bade him vote with the Hats. The consequence was that the offer was raised, five hundred plåts at a time, and when, in this manner, the neat sum of five thousand plåts was reached, and it was given to understand that the measure was full, the provost, to his great astonishment, began to find that the Caps were not altogether wrong. They should only prepare themselves for the sad possibility that the half-blind old Dean Pryss, of Åbo, might some fine day go the way of all the earth, and, in so mournful an event, it would be of much importance that his place should be occupied by a patriotic man, who knew how to guard the interests of the clergy. Wherefore he, Larsson, was prepared to sacrifice himself for that heavy and responsible calling, in case he received written assurance of the succession to it. The engagement was made out — for what was not in the power of the Caps?—and now the reverend man finally perceived that the Hats were extremely wrong, and the

Caps, on the contrary, were the only true foundation pillars of the country. The transaction was not to be despised. Of what inestimable value is a conviction, which, first on one side, and then on the other, brings in the fine profit of in all eight thousand five hundred plåts, and the dignity of a dean!

Jonas found his relative in the brightest mood, and in his innocence took courage to lament over the shameless system of bribery which ruled at the diet.

The provost's wide lips were curved by the most agreeable smile. "You may well say so!" he sighed, as he raised his eyes devoutly toward the ceiling. "The world is full of evil, and the slaves of Mammon think of nothing but their fleshly lusts. We must equip ourselves for a hard struggle, and not disdain worldly weapons. We must see to it that a humble share of this world's goods gets into worthy hands, for the benefit of the good cause. We must not thrust from us those temporal gifts which Heaven may send us to promote the good of the church and the land."

"Of course not! But, reverend father, you would not take bribes, would you?" innocently inquired the peasant.

"Heaven preserve us!" replied the provost, somewhat embarrassed, notwithstanding his hard forehead. "Who would take bribes? I only mean that any little mite which may fall to the benefit of a poor parish should not be despised, especially when it is known that a service is done to the country by means of it."

"So, reverend father, you accept bribes, do you?" asked Jonas once more, for he thought in all these meanderings he perceived the fumes of an evil conscience.

"We must not be too strict, my son!" exhorted the provost, in a paternal tone. "We are all weak mortals; we must think of poor children, and not slight what Heaven allots to us of this earthly bounty."

"And yet, reverend father, you have a fat pastorate and a great inheritance!" angrily exclaimed Bertila.

"I am a poor servant of the Lord, and scarcely have my daily bread—that you know very well, dear son!"

"You are the servant of the devil, you cursed priest, who will sell your fatherland!" exclaimed Jonas Bertila, in a raging fury, as he rushed out, slamming the door behind him.

CHAPTER X.

AN AUDIENCE WITH GUSTAF III.

IN vain were all the expenditures of the Hats; their two hundred thousand francs were the same as thrown into the sea. In the house of clergy, the Caps triumphed with a plurality of one vote, and Bishop Forsenius from Skara became their speaker. It had cost them three kegs of gold, in roubles and pounds sterling; but then, they now had three-fourths of the power. The last fourth was undetermined, for the nobility were yet to choose their speaker. This would perfect the victory on the one side, and the defeat on the other.

In the Swedish palace of nobles, with its brilliant old ancestry, the auction was thus to be closed. All equipped themselves to conquer or die—for country? No, for their share of the booty.

Honest Jonas Bertila had, for a week now, seen and heard much of which he had never been able to dream; but one thing was incomprehensible to him, and that was what the king might think about all this. Jonas very well knew how the lords wrangled about governing the kingdom, how one house wanted to obtain

privileges at the expense of the others, and how they vied in greed for illicit wages; but he did not understand what the king, about whom no one apparently troubled himself, but to whom all in secrecy appealed, had to do with all these intrigues. With his old inherited reverence for the father of the country, Jonas could not believe otherwise than that King Gustaf was ignorant of that infamous brokerage which here on every side was carried on with the welfare of the land, and he regarded it his duty, as a faithful subject, to enlighten the poor deluded monarch as to how badly his estates were using the honor of the realm.

"The good king is still so young and inexperienced," thought Jonas to himself, "he knows nothing about it, he thinks everything is going on honestly, and his court gentlemen are careful not to let him get a peep at their cards. But I will go to him, and tell him plainly how it is, even if my niggardly cousin in the house of burghers should burst with anger, and my reverend uncle in the house of clergy should read the litany over me seven times."

To think was to act. Jonas had lately read in the "News" that his royal majesty graciously allowed all his subjects, high and low, personally to present to him their complaints or wishes on the afternoon of every Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, between four and five o'clock, at the royal palace. It was now Wednesday; and Jonas set out on a direct route to his majesty.

When he approached the entrance of the castle, when he saw the sentinels, and when the large, majestic building, with its masses of stone, pressed him as it were to nothing, then for the first time Jonas felt his heart beat quicker than usual. What had he to do here? And how should he, an ignorant peasant, know how to put his words together before such grand gentlemen? Would he not do wisest to turn about?—But no; did he not see the swallows flying in through

that lofty entrance just as fearlessly as he had seen them fly under his low eaves in Storkyro, and was he not more than swallows! Was he not a member of the diet? Did he not come with honest intentions? He went on.

In the front room he had to wait, while the gentleman of the bedchamber for the day introduced the petitioners in the order they had announced themselves. Here were disabled soldiers on wooden legs, from the Pomeranian war; officers' widows, with pensions of eight plåts; poor curates in quest of pastorates; bankrupt merchants who wanted to set up soap-manufactories; mesdames who kept ale-houses and complained of the police; rock-blasters who had become blind by powder; discharged actors who declaimed passages from "Don Ranudo di Colibrados;" famished poets who carried in their pockets flattering placards two feet long; shoemaker boys with their ears closed by cuffs from their masters; chimney-sweeps who had tumbled down through the chimney;—in short, a sample chart of all real and imagined distress, and all these had in advance committed long lessons with which they would storm the sympathy of the king. But as that short hour would in this way scarcely have sufficed for one or two, each one was told to dispatch his business in two minutes, if his majesty was not pleased to question him particularly, and therefore all now stood with perspiring foreheads, meditating the best manner of speaking briefly and comprehensibly, while the gentleman of the bedchamber stood inexorable, with bell in hand, and cut off the harangue. It was remarkable, however, to observe how most of them went in bewildered and came out beaming, for King Gustaf's famous art of winning the human heart with a friendly word or a gracious look never failed to manifest itself on these occasions, and he now had more reason than ever to win hearts, for all these were a capital in his business. He disdained

not the most insignificant, for he needed these people perhaps more than they needed him.

One of the supplicants, Jonas thought he recognized. It was Hallberg, the runner of the Caps, in his own exalted person. "Just wait!" thought the honest peasant.

At last it was Jonas's turn; and before the remarkable speech about the mischief of the diet, which he intended to make to the king, was arranged in his mind, he was standing face to face with the monarch of Sweden, Finland, and Storkyro.

King Gustaf, in a somewhat simpler costume than usual, was sitting at a little work-table of ebony, and near him, together with the adjutant on duty, stood a secretary, who received the requests of the petitioners.

Expecting to hear the young peasant in his wadmal jacket present some supplication about abatement of taxes, the king gave him a transient and inquiring glance. But Jonas was not so instantly ready. One minute passed, and with it went half of the time fixed for his audience.

"How do matters stand, my friend?" asked the king, without the least sign of impatience. He had special reasons for wishing to stand well with the peasants.

A resident of Storkyro, but a native of Munsala, Jonas Bertila spoke Finnish and Swedish with equal ease, and this facility had been very seasonable at the diet, where those peasants who knew only the Finnish language were at a great disadvantage, one against eight or ten, as they commonly were, in the united Swedish and Finnish house of peasants. So Jonas made a scrape with his foot and replied:

"God save your majesty! Matters are in a bad fix."

"What have you to complain of? Is your farm going to be sold for crown arrears, or have you been burdened with long highways?" inquired the king.

"No, thank you," replied Jonas, who now began to get a tongue in his mouth, "my own affairs are in a tolerably good condition, although the taxes are pretty heavy, but the church music of the kingdom is in a bad fix. It is on the straight road to the devil, I tell your gracious majesty."

The king smiled, and gave a signal to his gentleman, who, with bell in hand, was ready abruptly to cut off this threatening beginning. "In what respects are matters in so bad a state?" he asked.

"Well," said Jonas, "the way of it is, they are milking each other's cows, right and left, here at the diet. Your gracious majesty may believe that they fly around worse than a clerk of the muster. There are folks running around here on the sly, whispering with the peasants and whispering with the burghers and whispering with the clergy, and they have their pockets full of bank-notes and silver dollars, jingle, jingle, for whomsoever will have them. And the peasants bow, and the burghers bow, and the clergy bow, and say, 'We most humbly thank you,—for whom shall we vote?' Well, the answer is, 'Vote for Hansson!' 'Vote for Sebaldt!' 'Vote for Forsenius!' And the fool does as the madman bids,—and that is the way it goes. But, your gracious majesty, you see it will not do, and though they should kill me on the spot, I would say, it is sheer rascality! For there is one knot yet in the skein which they are careful not to speak about, and so your gracious majesty can never in all the world scent out all their villainy."

"What can it be? Speak freely, my honest peasant!" said the king, amused at the frank speech of the man, and seeing through his honest design.

"I beg for grace, in case I talk the head off from me, for it may chance that I talk the head off from others too," discreetly replied Jonas, "but you see, the way of it is,—it is all a contrived plan. Your gracious majesty can never think how it is."

"No; how is it?"

"Well, the Frenchmen have bought one part of the kingdom, the Englishmen two, and the Russians two and a half. There are people who have sold the kingdom to all three. For you see it is their money!"

"No! Is it possible? I never knew that," replied the king, very seriously.

"I could believe that," said Jonas, with a nod. "And it is a good thing that your gracious majesty finds it out before they raffle off your crown. I, for my part, think it is shameless."

"I think so too," replied the king. "But what would you have me do with such people? I cannot hang the whole diet?"

"No," said Jonas, looking cautiously around him, "but your gracious majesty might take the gloves off from them."

"In what way, then?"

"That I do not presume to comprehend. Your gracious majesty is shrewder than you make yourself out to be. You know well enough what is best. I only say as the fiddler once said."

"What did the fiddler say?"

"He said: 'The tune is played out when the fingers are gone.'"

A quick, searching glance darted from those large, lustrous, blue eyes, and transfixed the bold speaker. Perhaps King Gustaf suspected that this peasant, who, with all his simplicity, did not lack a good share of shrewdness, was one of the deputed spies of the Caps. But he calmed himself, and in his former gracious tone immediately said: "I have heard another adage: 'If need be, one can dance on wooden legs.' Thank you, however, for your good intention. Is there anything you wish on your own behalf?"

"Nothing, thank you, except that your gracious majesty will drive Hallberg outdoors, for that is what I did. Day before yesterday he was running errands

for the Caps, and now he is standing out there, and wants to bow himself in."

"Very well, very well; I will keep you in mind."

The audience was ended, and Jonas withdrew. To his utter astonishment, he saw that the one who next after him obtained audience was no other than—Hallberg.

CHAPTER XI.

PAUL BERTELSKÖLD'S ARRIVAL HOME.

AT the very time when the parties in Sweden were most hotly bombarding each other with golden balls, that most unexpected event, which is mentioned in the beginning of this story, had spread an indescribable confusion within the Bertelsköld family, at its Falkby estate in East Gothland. We remember that the head of the family had received the terrible information of his wife's flight at the same moment that his younger son, Paul, accompanied by Eric Ljung, arrived at the paternal home.

On that noble but weak man, this news made an impression as though the earth had given way beneath his feet, and he, from a home of domestic happiness, had suddenly been moved into the midst of an unpeopled desert. His first desperation turned toward his elder son, Count Bernhard, who, ignorant of what had happened, increased his grief by his cold scorn regarding Paul.

"Unworthy son!" said the unhappy count. "You have crushed your father's heart; you have driven from his house the noblest woman on earth!"

In this upbraiding there was something which, quite against his wont, made that haughty young man's cheek turn pale. Silently he took the letter his father

reached him, and which contained the explanation of his step-mother's resolve.

Count Bernhard read, and his cheek became paler and paler. *This*, he had not expected. He had formed an opinion of his step-mother from the common human standpoint, as a prudent but ambitious woman, whose presumptuous claim to an equality with him he ought to repulse and punish, not only for his own sake, but also that of his father and the other children, who in the eyes of the world must suffer from a *mésalliance*. If his father had been weak enough to let himself be caught in the net of this ambitious burgher-daughter, it devolved upon him, the eldest son and the heir, to maintain the honor of the family. And if he could not undo what was done, he would at least render it harmless, by making his step-mother feel her dependence and his superiority,—by remanding her to the claimless position of a *tolerated* person, the highest to which she ought to aspire. That his step-mother would at the farthest seek to retain her place of equality, Count Bernhard expected; but that she should demand all or nothing—that, rather than buy a title with a humiliation, she would, with so bold a resolve, cut the knot she was unable in any other way to loose—had never occurred to him. Too late he now perceived that he had mistaken that high-born soul, just as proud as his own, only more elevated; and a transient emotion of repentance or perplexity took possession of his calculating mind. "I ought to have acted more warily," thought he to himself. "If this event becomes known it will cause scandal; the deserter will be represented as a martyr, our family will be compromised; I myself may suffer from it, and after such a rupture it will be disagreeable to meet that mad-cap, Paul. *Enfin*, we must counsel well before we act, and do everything to throw a veil over this *sottise*."

Within a shorter time than it has taken to relate this, Count Bernhard had formed his resolution. "Calm

yourself, father!" said he, in a respectful, almost affectionate tone. "It is a lamentable misunderstanding, which I hope we shall soon make right. This rupture is not irreparable, if we only succeed in giving it a milder coloring. Will you allow me to act in your place?"

"Do as you will," replied the crushed father, "only take no step that can put a stain on your mother, for her honor is ours!"

"That is also my opinion. Only leave the matter to me, and I promise that everything shall be made right."

With these words, Count Bernhard hurried down from the upper story, and in a tone of censure said to his father's *valet*, who met him on the stairs:

"Why were you not at your post last night when the countess went away?"

"When the countess went away?" repeated the servant, with the utmost astonishment.

"Is it your custom, sluggard, to sleep when your master needs you? Why, a message arrived in the night that the countess must immediately go to Nörrköping—the vessel which was to take her to the mineral springs in Pyrmont lay ready for sailing."

"I assure you, my gracious lord count, that neither I nor any of the other attendants knew the least thing about it," protested the *valet*, still more surprised.

"And such sluggards of seven sleepers are paid for their service!" continued Count Bernhard, with a well-feigned anger. "His grace and I had no one but my Spanish José to wait on the countess when the carriage came to take her away. But if his grace has been too indulgent to you, I will introduce another order of things. Remember it till another time, Söderlund, provided you wish to retain in your place, and tell your comrades the same. Where is Count Paul?"

"He went into the dining-room, asking after the countess. But see—there comes the young count!"

At that moment, Paul came rushing up the stairs, gaily embraced his brother, and with all the transport of an eighteen-year-old heart that is once more conscious of beating in the ancestral home, exclaimed:

"Here you have me, Bernhard! Oh, how glad I am to be with you again! Where is my mother? And how is our father, Bernhard?"

"Oh, it is good to see you again. Why, you are as tall as a grenadier! Our father is not quite well, but neither is he ill, and he will be delighted to embrace you," replied Count Bernhard, with much presence of mind evading the one question which was difficult to answer.

"And my mother, Bernhard, my mother! I hope she is well? Where is she, say? Why have I not by this time had an opportunity to embrace her? I asked them down stairs, but received incomprehensible answers."

"I hope our good mother is in excellent health," replied the brother, with an expression of much attachment assumed for the occasion.

"You hope? What does that mean? Is she sick, or why are you *hoping*, tell me? But then, where is she?"

"Oh! So you do not know that the countess has gone away! You have traveled past the letter? But why did you not write about your coming home? If our mother had had the least suspicion of that, she would surely have put off her journey, for it was not so very pressing. She might have chosen another vessel!"

"Gone away? My mother gone away!" exclaimed Paul with amazement, while the tears started to his eyes. "And I was feeling so delighted that I was now going to see her again! Oh, Bernhard! What a misfortune just now, when I so much needed a chance to kiss her hand and open to her my whole heart!"

"I know it; I heard it just now from Ljung, that

you had been suspended from the university. That was not right of you, Paul, to act so rashly. But we will consult together about some expedient, and what you now ought to undertake. We will confer with our father about your future and your *carrière*."

"My future—ah! that is indifferent to me; that will take care of itself. But my mother, Bernhard,—for heaven's sake, tell me, why has my mother gone away? And where has she gone? In her last letter she did not mention a word about it."

"That was natural,—she did not wish to make you uneasy. You perhaps do not know that she has for some years had a weak chest?"

"*She* a weak chest? Impossible! I have studied anatomy, and I assure you, Bernhard, that my mother is as strongly built as so well-formed a woman can be. From whatever she may suffer, it cannot be from a weak chest."

"You have not seen her for two years. She has grown very nervous."

"*She* nervous? Why, how absurd! Do you think *she* has become debilitated, like the fashion dolls of our day? If any one has sound, healthy nerves, it is my mother!"

"What do you know about it? Let the doctor dec'de that. Doctor Winge also spoke about some liver complaint. In short, he prescribed for the countess a journey to Pyrmont, as unavoidable for her health. We arranged for a vessel for her trip across, and last night the unexpected message arrived that the ship was ready for sailing, and the wind favorable. Consequently the countess was obliged to start in such haste that scarcely the attendants knew about it, and there you see the reason why you received incomprehensible answers."

CHAPTER XII.

A DANGEROUS SUBJECT.

"AND no letter for me?" asked Paul, thoughtfully.

"It is probable that the countess has written by post, her departure was so unexpected. . . . . But our father is waiting for you."

"Not a line to me!" bewailed the tender-hearted son. "How long is she going to stay at Pyrmont?"

"That depends on how the treatment agrees with her. The physician gives us the best hope that we can probably expect her back in September or October. I beg you, Paul, do not act so childishly over a simple thing that has no significance. Our father needs to see happy faces. You can imagine that he is pre-occupied, and misses his usual company. Let us amuse him, let us divert him. Louise will be delighted to see you again."

"Pardon me, Bernhard, one question more: How did it happen that my mother went alone?—that no one, not a single friend, attended her, when, as you say, she was sick and suffering?"

"Both our father and Louise offered to go with her to Pyrmont, but she refused so decidedly that we were at last obliged to yield," confidently replied Count Bertelsköld. "As to myself, you know I must, without delay, go to the diet, to represent our family in the house of lords. It is said that the most important questions are about to arise there, and I am, as you remember, a decided Hat. At whatever price, we must prevent the Caps from again coming into power, and the new king is not to be depended upon. He

will probably want to fly higher than his wings will carry him."

"I understand," said Paul, sorrowfully. "But nothing would have prevented me from going with my mother. Why did I not come yesterday? Well, it is as it is. I have an idea. Come, let us go to father!"

A moment later, Paul lay in his father's arms. A sincere attachment had always closely united Count Charles Victor Bertelsköld and his younger son. The joy of the meeting was now, however, greatly mixed with painful emotions. With heartfelt pleasure, the count regarded the exceedingly beautiful youth, who, in every feature, especially the dark lustrous eyes, reminded him of the mother. But this very memory filled him with sorrow and an embarrassment which he vainly sought to conceal. Paul was once more in the enjoyment of his father's affection; but he seemed to him to have grown old during those two years which had elapsed since their last meeting, and the count's visible embarrassment did not escape his keen glance. The two awaited, and the one feared an explanation of that enigmatical event which had blended so much bitterness with this reunion.

"Paul knows all," said Count Bernhard, as he exchanged a hasty glance with his father. "I have informed him of Doctor Winge's *regime*, which compelled our mother to leave us in such haste, to seek in Pyrmont a cure for her liver-complaint, and I have told him, father, how gladly you would have accompanied madame if she had not wished decidedly to go alone. Paul is no longer a child, father, so do not fear any ridiculous despair. He knows how to tranquillize himself in so ordinary a matter, and we are *d'accord* in hoping for the best. His mischance at Åbo he will revenge with a double *succès* at Upsala or Lund."

"Tell me about your misstep without fear," said the father, glad to lead the conversation away from the dangerous subject. "Whatever a Bertelsköld may

have done amiss, I am sure that he never could have acted contrary to the claims of honor."

"Thank you, father. You have guessed perfectly right," replied Paul, and now briefly related his bold opposition to the ruling theology, without concealing that harshness to which he had allowed himself to be transported. "But," he added, "I beg your consent, father, to make amends for my fault in another manner than my brother has proposed. From Stockholm, an expedition in the interest of natural history is soon to set out for Spain and Africa. My friend Ljung has offered in advance to get me an opportunity, through Archiater Linnæus, to take part in it. I did not accept that proposal at the time, as I was unprepared for those events which afterward occurred; but I should now regard myself fortunate if I could have the privilege of making the trip, the more so, as I might on the way visit my mother in Pyrmont."

Count Bernhard again exchanged a glance with his father, and hastened to reply:

"But, my dear Paul, it is impossible that you should so quickly leave our father, who needs your company so much, now that I am going away. Have patience till a more convenient occasion; and if you will *partout* make a journey, then put it off at least till next autumn."

"I will submit to my father's will," responded Paul; "but if I can be of any use to my mother, if I can give her any pleasure, where she is now alone and perhaps sick in a strange land, I am sure my father will not refuse my request."

"You are a good son, Paul, and we will think more particularly of your proposal," said the count, greatly embarrassed over the dangerous subject. "But it must seem reasonable to you that I do not want immediately to lose you again, now that I have got you back. Let us to-day forget all anxieties, and think only of the

present. Where is Eric Ljung? It is not hospitable in us to forget his presence."

With these words, and with a brow which too plainly depicted the anxieties he declared himself desirous of forgetting, the count went to welcome his wife's relative, where that gentleman, unpretentious, and unaccustomed to finding himself surrounded by so much magnificence, was waiting in the drawing-room until some one chose to remember his existence.

Count Bertelsköld cordially pressed the hand of that honest friend, and with ardent words thanked him for the two years Paul, had found in his house a second home. They were soon immersed in a conversation on that subject, and Paul found an opportunity to look up his little sister Vera, who, undisturbed by the events of the night, and without a suspicion that it had cost her a mother, had been sleeping the sleep of innocence when her brother arrived.

It was not yet later than eight o'clock in the morning, and Paul was about to steal into Vera's sleeping room, when in the door he met Baroness Louise, in *déshabillé*, and roused up from her morning nap by her waiting-maid, who brought her the surprising report of the countess's disappearance.

"Whom do I see? Paul?" she exclaimed. "And where is your mother?"

"Ah, Louise!" said he, "why do you ask me about that?"

"I thought you knew," she replied with confusion. "Did not the countess go to meet you on the way?"

"Meet me? Good heavens! what can this mean? Why, my mother has gone away. You must know that better than I."

"Gone away? Yes, you are right,—that is, I suppose she has gone to Stockholm," responded the baroness, who plainly perceived that some mystery lay beneath all this, but did not know what to think or say about it. Fortunately, Count Bernhard, who had his

reasons for not letting his brother get out of sight for a moment, just then came in.

"But Louise, I do not understand what you mean," rejoined Paul, perplexed at this ignorance.

"You are mistaken, my dear," Count Bernhard hastened to interpose. "It was not by way of Stockholm, but by way of Nörrköping, that madame last night started for Pyrmont. And, as she expressly forbade our waking you, it ought not to astonish Paul to see your surprise at the unexpected departure," he added, with a look at his sister, and uncertain as to how far she had compromised herself on the dangerous subject.

CHAPTER XIII.

INEXPLICABLE ENIGMAS.

PAUL did not answer, but something undefined remained in his soul. He went to his sister Vera, and found the little one just awakened, but still in bed, and occupied with looking at her pretty, white foot, which she had thrust out from under the coverlet, and was coquetting before herself.

When Vera saw the tall, strange young man in the door, she drew the coverlet over her head, and could not be prevailed upon to let it come out of that law-protected haven. But when her brother, with tender force, freed her brown curly head from the covering, and she at last recognized that dear voice, which for a long time she had not heard, Vera's eyes beamed with a sunshine which resembled her mother's in her happy days, and it was not long before she flew up, lightly costumed as she was, and now laughing, now weeping, hung around the beloved brother's neck. Ever since the birth of the younger children, the Bertelsköld family

had been two cloven halves of the same apple, and these two had continually joined closer together against the coldness of the elder brother and sister. Now Vera had her Paul back, now everything was again well, now they would play, as they used to do, in the green park, and now—she was sure of that—that naughty Bernhard would no more venture to shoot her little lambs. Within a few minutes she had told and asked him a thousand things, without waiting for reply, and the end was always a cry of delight over—mamma's happiness.

"But—why, you are taller than mamma!" said she, suddenly interrupting herself, as she blushed, and with embarrassment stole back beneath the protecting coverlet. "Now you must be good, and go away until I am dressed; will not take five minutes. I want to see how mamma looks when she sees you. Why did she not come with you? Why has she not come to say my prayer with me, as she does every morning? One day last winter she forgot it, when papa was sick, and that day there was no morning prayer at all, but, Paul, that day went badly. I spoiled Bergflygt's prettiest pot plant, I sprained my foot, I had toothache, I quarreled with tall Karin in the kitchen, and got terrible scoldings. It is never pleasant when we have forgotten to say our morning prayer."

"Do you not know that mamma has gone away?" inquired Paul, with strange feelings.

Vera looked at him with wide open eyes. "Gone away?" said she. "No one will make me believe that. Do you think I am as easily fooled as I used to be?"

"I understand. She would not waken you, when she was so unexpectedly obliged to go last night."

"Do you believe that? How can you be so simple? My mamma go away without saying good-bye to me? No, they have been making you believe that, to play a trick on you. You will see, when you go out, that mamma is hiding behind the door, and will cover your

eyes with both her hands, and say, 'Guess who it can be!' And then you see they will laugh at you for allowing yourself to be fooled."

What wonderful power lies in the faith of a child! In little Vera's firm confidence, there was something so contagious, that Paul hastily opened the door, to see if it was not all a miserable jest, and if his mother was not standing behind the door, smiling, and ready with both hands to cover his eyes, and say those dear words that she used to say when he was a child, "Guess who it is!"

But there was no one behind the door, and again he sadly sat down on the edge of Vera's bed.

"I suppose, though, our mother sometime said that she was going away for her health?" he asked.

"She never did so. Why should she say what she never intended to do? My mamma cannot say what is not true," replied the girl, with much decision.

"But try to remember! Perhaps she said something, for instance yesterday, that you should be obedient when she was gone, or that you should not forget your morning and evening prayer, although she could not for awhile pray with you."

"She did not say that. I only saw that she was very sad sometimes, when Bernhard was bad to her, and called her madame. Mamma did not like to be called madame, although it is a polite word, she said, and is used in speaking to empresses and queens."

"Was not Bernhard polite to mamma?"

"Oh, yes. He is always polite when he is real abusive."

"What did mamma say when you came to bid her good night?"

"I kissed her hand, and she kissed my forehead. 'Sleep sweetly,' said she."

"Nothing more?"

"Yes, afterward she said, 'Tell Reata not to forget to put out the light!' It was dark last night, although

it is summer. We had company, and went to bed later than usual. When mamma left me, she turned around in the door, and said, 'God protect you!'"

"But nothing about a journey?"

"Nonsense with your journey! Go away, so I can get up, and you shall see that I will find my mamma!"

Paul left her, and went out into the park, to seek in nature that serenity he lacked in his gloomy heart. "It is nevertheless so," said he to himself. "She has gone without a farewell, in order to spare both herself and Vera the first pain of separation."

Meantime Count Bernhard was called to his father.

"This dissimulation is becoming insufferable and unworthy," said the old count, whose frank, knightly character could not reconcile itself with that strange intrigue in which he saw himself involved against his will. "I cannot endure to pretend a tranquillity before Paul, while I am obliged to deceive him, and am myself a prey to doubt and anxiety. We must put an end to it, and I am prepared to tell him all."

"I conjure you, father, not to be precipitate," pleaded Count Bernhard. "Before we with certainty know anything about the disappearance of the countess, and the means of making good her *sauve qui peut*, we should risk everything if we confided this family secret to a hot-headed boy, a Gil Blas, a Don Quixote, who will put heaven and earth in motion to find his mother again. A little more patience, father; Louise is now initiated *au fond des choses*, and we three will together make every exertion to discover and bring back the fugitive. If we are successful, as I have every reason to expect, it will afterward be easy to give out that madame has for instance arrived too late at Nörrköping. Upon her arrival there, the vessel had already sailed; and, as some celebrated physician has prescribed another treatment for her, for instance, at Ramlösa, she returns, if it must needs be so. For heaven's sake, no uneasiness, no questions,—they might betray us, for

the servants are as yet only half convinced. But when they see us perfectly tranquil, they will at last believe the fable I have had circulated; we shall gain time, and on that depends everything."

"What a shame, to be obliged, like a criminal, to avoid and deceive my own servants, my own children!"

"And for whose sake are we doing it? Is it not all for the sake of her who has brought all this trouble upon us?"

"You, who have driven your second mother into distress and exile, forget your own share in it!" ejaculated the father, with exasperation.

"Father, I, too, might answer you something on that point, but we have no time for reproaches over what has happened. We must together try to make good its consequences. Once more let me act, and all shall be well; but if you prematurely frustrate my efforts, the rupture will be irreparable, and scandal is inevitable."

"Then do what is in your power," said the count, reluctantly. "But within three days everything must be clear. Longer than that, I cannot continue in the *rôle* of a deceiver."

A haughty, scarcely perceptible smile curled the lip of Count Bernhard, as he left his father, and went to give necessary instructions to his Spanish *valet*, the only one who possessed his confidence. He himself went to gather, with the greatest caution and craft, every trace which could lead to the discovery of the countess's flight and present place of abode.

Her flight must have occurred between one o'clock in the night, when she left her husband's room, and four o'clock in the morning, when the servants began to stir. She had taken with her a part of her clothes,—only some linen and a few every-day garments, it is true, but more, however, than she had herself been able to carry. She must thus have had an assistant; but whom?

Count Bertelsköld satisfied himself that no fresh wheel-tracks led from the Falkby grounds to the highway, with the exception of the chaise which had brought Paul and his companion hither. So the countess must either have walked to the highway, or fled across the sea, and the latter supposition seemed to be confirmed by the fact that one of the boats moored at the landing yesterday had disappeared. But she had not possibly been able to venture out alone across the water. Some one must have rowed her across, and had perhaps not yet returned. Who was that boatman?

Count Bernard secretly informed himself whether any of the servants of the place chanced to be away. No one was missing. His suspicions fell upon Bergflygt; but the old gardener, brusque yet tranquil, was found busied as of old with his plants.

CHAPTER XIV.

GATHERING STORMS.

In the evening, Spanish José came back from his investigations, and made his report. Under the pretext of buying horses, he had roved about through the whole neighborhood, but all in vain. He had offered a large reward to any one who could get on track of a pretended thief, that in the night had stolen his master's fowling-piece; and a wandering Visigoth, who had been seen in the neighborhood the same night, had been pointed out to him.

"You are an incapable blockhead!" said his master, with vexation. "I have discovered more than you,—one of the boats at the landing is gone."

"*Per Dio, signore,*" said the Spaniard, "I will be hanged if any one has used the boat but myself, when

I rowed across the water at your grace's own command."

Count Bernhard bit his lip. "Here," said he, "are ten specie dollars for you when you effect something, and a hundred when you procure me the whole truth about what we are seeking."

"*Gracias, signore*, you shall be satisfied with me," replied the *valet*, with a sly wink.

At Falkby there was one more who spent the whole day in searching, and that was Vera. She could not possibly be convinced that her mother had gone away from her without saying good-bye. She began by hunting through the whole house, from garret to cellar, from the massive walnut wardrobe to the little drawers in her doll-press. Not finding anyone there, she instituted a search in the garden and hot-houses, with the secret hope of finding her mother hidden behind a bush or a plant-jar. From the garden she went to the park, from there to Bergflygt, from there to the laborers' cottages and the dependents of the estate, continually with the same question, if some one had not seen her mamma, whom they had stolen from her. And when no one could give an answer to that strange question, Vera declared that she would go "as far as the road reached" on the same errand, until at last hunger, more than Beata, her *bonne*, prevailed on her to return home.

If Count Bernhard had not so deeply disdained those base mortals who were not born to a title, he would have guarded against all those whispers to which Vera's childlike inquiries gave an increased rapidity. The domestics of Falkby were, as the count had rightly observed, only half convinced of the singular journey to Pyrmont and Nörrköping, of which no one had beforehand known a word; and what were they to think when the youngest lady, the darling and pet of the countess, knew still less than they? Before the day passed, the rumor of the countess's sudden disappear-

ance, exaggerated and interpreted in twenty ways, had spread from Falkby to all the extensive surrounding estate.

And now opinions were divided about the character of the countess. Her great beneficence toward all, united with so much dignity, had won her many devoted friends, while others had not yet forgotten those rumors which had been current about her Finnish black art. "She was an angel from heaven, and therefore was not allowed to live," exclaimed some. "She was a witch from the abyss, and her time was out," was the opinion of others.

For the rumor soon became general that the countess was no longer in existence, that during the past night she had suddenly vanished, it was not known how; and, while some conjectured that she had jumped into the sea, others ventured to throw out suspicions of a violent death—at whose hand, care was taken not to say aloud, but each had an opinion of his own. In short, the whole parish fell into a general consternation. Strictly speaking, the countess of the manor had really been a good mother to all her dependents; and even a witch, of such amiable qualities, could not without regret, without an uproar in all hearts, vanish from the world so suddenly, so mysteriously.

Ignorant of all this, Paul went out in the evening, with Eric Ljung, to show him the pretty environments of the castle, and himself to re-survey the places which had been dear to him from childhood's days. Through the park they passed to the sea, and thence across the meadows to the little church and village, which enjoyed the most charming site in the valley below that elevation where the lordly castle flaunted its magnificence. The evening was mild and sunny, the landscape was verdant with the first beauty of summer. The two ramblers were charmed. In the pleasure of seeing those fine cultivated fields, and the new buildings with which his ancestral home had been embellished

in late years, Paul forgot his sorrows, and his botanical friend found, in the splendid flora of the neighborhood, an enjoyment which outweighed all its other beauties.

"Come," said Paul, as he directed his steps toward the church, "it is Saturday evening, the time when the village-boys play ball on the church-hill."

They were soon standing at the end of the valley, which, next to the church, was the common play-ground of the young; but, instead of the game, a group of twenty or thirty persons, inhabitants of the village, who had left their work earlier than usual, were now seen. They seemed to be earnestly talking together about some important subject; a cloud of anxiety lay on the faces of the greater number, and some of the women were shedding tears.

"The good people!" said Paul to his friend, "they must have something on their minds which disturbs them. Come, let us ask them the cause of their trouble. Perhaps we can give them some good counsel."

Paul Bertelsköld, like his sister Vera, had been a favorite with the retainers of the estate. They had already, through their mother, stood nearer to the people than their most noble brother and sister, and from childhood they had learned to acknowledge human worth, even in the inhabitants of cots. Often had Paul taken part in the games of the village-boys; all knew him, all used to answer his friendly greeting heartily, and now when he had returned after so long an absence, the noise of the crowd suddenly ceased, but when they became aware of his presence, no one greeted him, no one bade him welcome, all paused in embarrassment, and any one who could do so stole silently away.

"What now, Peter?" said Paul to one of his former playmates, a young fellow who reluctantly lifted his blue cap, "have you stared yourself blind at the village-girls, that you do not recognize me, since the last time we played foot-ball at the cross-roads?"

The fellow scratched his fore-top, and turned on his heel without replying.

"And you, Mårtensson," continued Paul, as he turned to an athletic peasant, who had been head-servant at the manor, "how is it with you, old man? Is your old horse alive yet?—the one that always threw me when I was going to show my skill, and always kicked up when any one tickled him on the neck?"

"Thank you, sir," replied the peasant, with wide open eyes, "no evil has befallen *us*."

There was an emphasis on that *us*, which made Paul ask again.

"Then why are you standing here and looking surly, as though the enemy were in the land? What is it you are consulting about so earnestly to-night?"

"What should we consult about?" was the reply. "When grand gentlemen ride, the peasant steps out of the road."

"If I were a peasant, I would ride too," merrily replied the young man. "And you, Mother Risa, who make the best cheeses in the village, have you forgotten, my good woman, that I was one of your best customers?"

"God preserve the gracious young lord from all the evil of these evil times!" replied the old woman, courtesying to the very ground, while the tears rolled down her withered cheeks.

"Is it such an affliction to you to see me again, or has Mårtensson's dog swallowed your whole tub of sour-milk?"

"Behold, when one is young, he can still be gay, though that has happened which never ought to have happened," bewailed the old woman, as she wept still more bitterly.

"Well, what is it, then, that has happened?"

"Heaven preserve me from ever letting it pass my lips. She was so gentle-hearted, and fair to the eyes,—we shall certainly never have another like her. But

we are all miserable creatures. No one knows the day or the hour when the Lord shall call us."

"Poor old woman! Have you lost your daughter? I recollect,—she left this world four years ago."

The old woman was silent. To his surprise, Paul observed that all the rest had stolen away, and as his companion had also made use of the opportunity to examine a few kinds of lichen on the stones, he found himself alone with the old woman.

"What do you mean? And why does everybody steal away, as though he had an evil conscience?"

The old woman looked cautiously around her, and having satisfied herself that no one heard her, leaned toward the young man's shoulder, and whispered in his ear:

"Beware of the Spanish gypsy!"

"José? What does that mean?"

"It is he!"

"I do not understand you."

"God grant you open eyes and ears, gracious master, for we live in an evil world, and none of us is safe from the arrows of darkness. Beware, and remember that I have said it. The same ax which has felled the mature tree in its very prime, may also fell the young shoot in the flower of his beauty. Behold, the enemy has gone forth over the ripened ear; why should his foot not trample the tender blade?"

"But, Mother Risa, I do not understand a word of all that!"

"Would to God you might never understand a letter of it!" muttered the old woman, as with a courtesy she departed, and jogged slowly back to the village.

CHAPTER XV.

THE RIFT IN THE ICE.

LIFE has sometimes been likened to an ice-covered sea, on which careless man marches with light foot, and where sledges speed forward without a thought of the brittleness of the bridge, or of the deep awaiting below, until the ice now slowly thaws, now suddenly breaks, and the careless crowd disappears.

Sometimes, too, when the skater darts forward on his bright way, a smothered report is heard, and when he looks around, he sees a fissure in the ice. It may be a warning, or it may signify nothing. The thoughtless one, untroubled, continues his course, but the wise looks about him for the shore.

Paul Bertelsköld now found himself on just such an insecure sheet of ice; and those unexplained hints, those mysterious warnings, which he had received in the village, had made a deeper impression on his disheartened mood than he himself cared to admit. Thoughtful and silent, he walked at the side of Eric Ljung back to the castle; when on the narrow road which led to the shore, and where the grooms used to ride the horses to water, he saw Rasmus, the Skånian, coming in a singular manner, dangling on his horse's back.

The boy was not known to be in the habit of taking a glass too much, and Paul asked him what ailed him.

Instead of answering, Rasmus began to sob worse than a syrup-machine,—if such things had at that time been in use.

His young master was not in a good humor, and threateningly raised the riding-whip.

"Hold the animal still, and quit jerking the halter! Answer me; are you sick?"

"I am conjured!" sobbed the boy.

"What does that mean?"

"I am bewitched."

"Who has bewitched you?"

"I don't dare to tell you. The gracious young nobleman is so angry."

"Will you answer?" and the riding-whip was raised.

"If the young nobleman will promise not to be angry, I'm sure it shall come out," replied the boy, with a desperate effort to silence the syrup-machine.

"I promise you a flogging if you keep still, and a plåt if you speak honestly," responded Paul, who suspected that the desperate sobs of the boy had some connection with the strange demeanor of the people in the village.

"In that case, I will tell everything as it is," said Rasmus, "for you see, young sir, you will find it out for all that, and it is not my fault that the late countess was so bewitched. For you see she was a Christian being enough, though matters are said to be not just right in Finmark and Russia, where they say she was born. God bless her soul."

"What countess?"

"Well, you see that was the knot, as the shoemaker said when he got a flea in his waxed-end. Who else should it be than the late countess, your mother?"

"Are you crazy, or has fat Hans been making a fool of you with himself at the alehouse?"

"See, now the young lord is getting angry again," said the boy, with a discreet movement to one side.

"Why, you see I am calm!" said Paul, while all his blood was boiling.

"I could believe you knew about it already, sir," continued Rasmus, still ready, in case of necessity, to

save himself by a hasty flight. "For you see I gossiped a little, yesterday, about the late countess's black art, and I got paid for it by the master. But the tongue is an evil thing, as the old woman said when she took drops, and last night I had the nightmare. When I got up my head was like lead, and the evil one has been pinching me all day in the end of my little finger. I cannot stand and I cannot walk, and when I try to ride, every fence-post dances like a wall-flower at a feast. That, you see, is what I have got for having such a big mouth."

"Go and lie down; you are sick!" and Paul, who now began to understand that the boy was delirious.

"It was not I that made off with her," continued Rasmus, confusedly. "It was Joseph, you see, sir. Last night, when I could not sleep, I went to the window, and it was half dark yet, when I saw her grace go across the yard, just as she went here in the world, and a fellow went with her, who carried her things, and they went to the sea, but from the sea she never came back, you see, sir. People say that such folks float awhile like chips on the water, and then, when their time is come, they sink like stones straight down to the bottom."

"Home with you!" exclaimed Paul, and seizing the horse by the bridle, he led it to the house, where Rasmus was shut up and put to bed.

There was one word in his ravings that was like the rift in the ice, and that was "the late countess"

At the steps, Vera was awaiting her brother. "I have something to tell you," she whispered. "I was standing by the kitchen door, without any one's seeing me, and heard tall Karin tell the others that no carriage had been here last night. 'It is not true that mamma has gone away,' she said. 'No carriage has been here, and no one on all the place has known of any.' I could not hear what else she told, but she said mean things about Bernhard's José."

"Are you a Lady Bertelsköld, and listen at the kitchen door to the gossip of the servant girls?" said the brother, chidingly, while a shudder quivered through every joint.

"Forgive me!" pleaded the girl. "I will not do it again. Now you hear our mother has not gone away; she has hidden herself in order to frighten us and make us real glad when she comes back."

Paul kissed her without replying. It was now his turn to lose equipoise. He hurried to seek his father, with the firm resolution to get light in this terrible darkness, from which those awful words, "the late countess," continually sounded, like a passing-bell, in his ears.

The count had ridden out to look at a new improvement, and had not yet returned. Paul met, instead, his sister Louise, who was frightened at his altered appearance.

"Good heavens! how pale you are! Are you not well?" asked the baroness, who cherished for her handsome younger brother all the affection her volatile heart, made captive by worldly thoughts, was capable of holding and which she had not already bestowed on the elder brother.

"Where is my mother?" said Paul.

"Madame?" inquired Louise, confused and startled. "Why do you ask me? What do I know about it?"

That "madame" which his mother had not been able to endure from her step-children, added oil to the fire.

"I do not ask you after madame; I ask you, where is my mother!" exclaimed Paul, as he seized his sister passionately by the arm.

"But, Paul, my dear Paul, I beg you calm yourself! You are sick; you have caught cold on the journey."

"Listen to me, Louise. I am not sick, I am not

insane, although I might become so, from everything I have heard during the last hour. I will be calm,—you see I am calm. Everything is as it was, the sun is shining, Falkby is still standing in its place, I do not pull down its walls, I do not go armed with sword and pistols, as in a robber's den. I ask you only, where is my mother? You are my sister, I know, and Bernhard is my brother, and my father is my father, and I am myself; but where is my mother? I want to know what you have done with my mother!"

"Let go my arm! I do not understand what you say," exclaimed the baroness, almost as pale as her brother, and nearly fainting.

At that moment entered Count Bernhard, who, all day occupied with his extensive correspondence, had been unable to watch the steps of Paul, as he had proposed to do.

"Save me! Save me! Paul has become insane!" shrieked Louise, and sunk powerless in Count Bernhard's arms.

Paul let go her arm, and with blazing eyes turned to his brother.

"Take her! Guard her with glass and a frame, the poor Louise, who has not the courage to answer me: 'I have lied!' It is now your turn!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE STORM BREAKS LOOSE.

IT was not in vain that Bernhard Bertelsköld had studied the celebrated art of the diplomat—on the most critical occasions to maintain an imperturbable calmness; with the greatest tranquillity declare black to be white; alternately to irritate and soothe his an-

tagonist, and finally weary him out, in order, at the first favorable opportunity, to disarm him, and regain lost ground. He perceived that Paul knew *something*, and resolved to let him finish his raving, in the hope that that *something* was not *everything*.

"My dear Paul," said he, "if you have learned such wild domestic manners in Finland, it does not surprise me that your learned friends at Åbo have sent you hither to be civilized. Here, Louise, is a glass of water! Faint no more, my sweet friend, although I admit that it becomes you excellently. There—sit down! Paul is only waiting to kiss your hand and beg your pardon."

"Have no uneasiness, it is past now," said the baroness, as she recovered herself with a readiness which showed that this was not the first time she had fainted. "My presence will probably be superfluous, and I beg to leave the gentlemen alone."

Count Bernhard offered her his arm.

"Be careful," she whispered, "he is wild!"

"I know the art of taming wild colts," replied the diplomat.

Paul found time to regain self-possession, but his blood continued to boil. He was like a vessel of burning oil, which at the least disturbance is spilled over the brim.

"I have asked Louise where my mother is," said he, with gloomy resoluteness, while his dark eyes rested on his brother with a dangerous, ill-boding calm.

"Indeed," replied Count Bernhard—that famous, Swedish *jasa*, which can be seething hot, or freezing cold, friendly or hostile, polite or insulting, according to how it is spoken. "And what did she answer?"

"Nothing. And nothing is too little."

"There are questions to which nothing is the best answer," said Count Bernhard, indifferently. "Be reasonable, my dear Paul, and throw aside your silly notions. I hope madame is very well."

"Where!"

"In Nörrköping, of course,—in case she has not, as I suppose, already taken ship."

"You lie!"

"What? Another proof of your Finnish education. I beg you, my young sir, somewhat more to weigh your *bons mots.* I do not intend to faint, like Louise, but I do not like compliments which savor of the hostler's room."

"I want also to make a request of you," said Paul. "Lay aside that *nonchalant* tone, which you can use when you speak to children or to the ladies at a ball. On me it makes no impression. You do not know me. I am no longer what I was when we separated. There is something within me which says that we must become enemies; and that would be hard, Bernhard, for you know we are brothers! I beg you, speak honestly, speak uprightly, speak to me as a brother, and answer me: where is my mother?"

"Most cheerfully. *Soyons amis, Cinna;* I ask nothing better. Must I necessarily be just as sentimental and eccentric as yourself, in order to win your gracious approbation? What interjections shall I make use of, to speak to your taste? What oaths shall I swear, in order to be believed! I swear by Jupiter that you are mistaken! I protest, by Odin, Thor and Freya, that you have got a lot of crazy fancies into your head. Are you satisfied with that, or must I seek still other divinities? With the exception of Olympus, where I am *chez moi,* I fear that my mythology will fall short of yours."

"Is that all that you have to answer me? Put yourself in my place. Imagine that you, like me, have a mother, whom you love above everything else in the world, and that she suddenly vanishes, no one knows where; would you not compel the very stones to speak, when you asked them: Where is my mother!"

"Go and ask the stones in the road, and they will

answer you—in lapidary style, of course—she went to Nörrköping."

"My mother has not gone to Nörrköping."

"*Eh bien*, you answer your own questions. What then do you ask of me?"

"Truth. I want to know *where* my mother now is. I have a right to demand it, and all hell let loose shall not deceive me longer."

"My dear Paul, you ought to confess that I have listened with the most admirable patience to your absurd declamations. Get possession of your wits, and in heaven's name tell me what further I am to answer on that point. Madame has gone, according to all that we know, to embark on a vessel for such and such points; and now you demand that I shall be a seer, a prophet, a Swedenborg, who ought to tell you where she, for the moment, has the goodness to be. Admit, my friend, that this is ridiculous."

Paul was silent. Of course he had no proof. Should he expose himself to his brother's laughter, by telling him all the floating rumors on which he based his suspicions?

But Count Bernhard, who too soon thought himself sure of victory, came to his assistance. "I will show you more forbearance than you have deserved," said he. "José shall be sent *exprès* to Nörrköping this evening, to get the most exact information about madame's departure, and to-morrow forenoon he ought to be back. Are you content with that?"

"José?" exclaimed Paul, as all his dark thoughts returned. "José, do you say? Now I see through you. There is something, however, which you want to conceal, and, in order to mislead me, you want me to put faith in a wretch who is your obedient creature, and ready for anything, to perform your errands. By the heaven to which you appeal, Bernhard, I now begin to believe that you are the greatest villain on earth! But you shall not deceive me I swear—not by your

miserable gods, but by my honor and my noble shield, which can guage itself with your own,—that, if you do not immediately answer me pure, plain truth, I shall myself go to Nörrköping, before the sun sets; and woe unto you if I catch you in a lie! For if you have ventured to tamper with my mother's life or honor or happiness, by the least word, neither my father's son, nor any one in the world, shall protect you from my arm, and I shall call on you to account for it, even though it should cost the life and welfare of you and me and of us all. Will you now answer me?"

The burning oil had been spilled over the brim. Paul's dark eyes blazed, his hand grasped his brother's —at that moment he was beautiful and terrible.

But before Count Bernhard had had time to invent a new skillful turn to escape the furious runaway colt, as he might have expressed himself, the noise of people at the steps outside was heard, and in rushed José, the Spanish *valet*, bleeding, and with torn clothes and wildly staring eyes, while terror was depicted in his brown swarthy countenance, and the long black hair flew in wild disorder over his forehead.

"Save me! For the sake of the Holy Virgin and all the saints, save me, señor!" stammered he, as, in the greatest agony, he clasped his master's knees.

The reason was immediately evident, for, in the open door, with loud shouts, a tumultuous crowd of people appeared, who checked themselves at the sight of the two counts, and remained standing at the threshold, without venturing to intrude into the room. Paul immediately understood their meaning. The news of the countess's disappearance had in the beginning called forth only a mute consternation among the retainers of the estate, but during the day rumors more and more extravagant had transformed the consternation to a fermenting uproar, which had received new nourishment from Paul's visit to the village, and

had finally incited the ordinarily peaceful Ostro-goths to a perfect fury. From mouth to mouth flew the story of the beloved countess's pitiful death;—and who was more likely to be to blame for that misdeed than the newly-arrived Spanish gypsy, as the people called him, who, with his tawny, foreign face, his singular looks and his haughty manner, at the very first view had awakened fear, aversion, and perhaps also envy? All, however, would probably have stopped with only threats, had not José, ignorant of those suspicions, been imprudent enough to show himself in the village, where he was immediately surrounded and badly abused by the exasperated crowd.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE OLD STORY OF TWO BROTHERS.

"WHAT do these stupid peasants want? How have they ventured to lay hands on my *valet?*" asked Count Bernhard, as he mechanically seized a pair of loaded pistols, which, in Spain, he had been accustomed continually to carry in his breast pocket.

"They are *the stones by the roadside* that speak when you keep silence," whispered Paul, in a voice trembling with sorrow and anger. "They cannot comprehend that a person vanishes without cause, and they attribute a share in it to José."

"These your allies!" coldly responded Bernhard. "Go away, José! No one shall venture to insult you again, and before I go to Stockholm, day after to-morrow, I will see that the refractory scoundrels have an exemplary punishment. Söderlund!" and he rang for his father's old functionary, "bolt the door, and tell

the grooms to drive the insolent rabble back to the village with their horsewhips!"

"Not until you have proved that the rabble is wrong," defiantly interposed Paul.

"*Charmant!* You expect me to treat with peasants! And about what, if I may be allowed to ask? Do you know, my friend, I begin to have quite as poor an opinion of your common-sense as of the rest of your amiable qualities. But I ought not to wonder at your sympathies with the mob. It is natural—it runs in the blood."

Scarcely was this spoken before Paul seized the left hand of his brother so violently that three fingers were thrown out of joint, and the blood was forced out from beneath the nails. "I said you should be responsible to me for the least insult to my mother!" said the young man, between his teeth.

Fortunately they were alone in the room, for the expression of mortal hatred which suddenly flamed up in the cold and proud features of Count Bernhard was so terrible that Paul himself started back and let go the dislocated hand. It lasted only half a second, but that was sufficient to reveal the impassable gulf which from that hour must forever separate the two brothers.

"Crazy boy!" burst out Count Bernhard, as he needed all his famous art to struggle at once against his fury and the physical pain. "I have still my right hand to chastise you for the left, and if I had not the misfortune of being obliged to call a miserable plebeian my brother, nothing should prevent my answering your hand-pressure as any nobleman would do in my place. But for this time it may be enough if you find out why you have, like a madman, been rushing around, trumpeting forth your own dishonor. Let it be my revenge and your punishment."

"For half an hour I have only asked truth from your lying lips," replied Paul, with equal pride, "and

it was in your power to spare yourself my hand-pressure, if you had granted my request. Say the worst you know, insult me as much as you please, only do not insult my mother, and speak the truth. With anything dishonorable you will never be able to upbraid me."

"Judge yourself," said Count Bernhard, as with a shrug he threw himself into the nearest arm-chair. "Have the goodness to be seated, for your caresses have the peculiarity of fatiguing."

Paul took a seat near him. They were separated by only a foot, and yet the distance between them had grown, in the last few minutes, to many miles.

"So," began Bernhard, "we will now, for the sake of change, be perfectly candid to each other. Indeed! I do not know why I have hitherto put myself to the trouble of sparing your delicacy, when nature, so stepmotherly, seems to have provided you with that peculiarity. But, *apropos* of step-mothers, you perhaps remember that your mother was once a chambermaid at Falkby, where she found a shelter, after certain little adventures in Stockholm, which it is unnecessary to mention.

"You forget our agreement!" threateningly ejaculated Paul. "You begin with a lie and continue with a calumny."

"I beg to be excused from any further caresses, my lord! But sit down, I beg you, and let us in all tranquillity come to the matter. As you perhaps know, my father was weak enough, at about two and twenty years of age, to become enamored of a girl from the crowd—I do not for the present remember her name, —and that gallant connection was broken off when he married my mother. Unfortunately, he was not long permitted to keep a wife who was in all respects worthy of him. She died, leaving two children, my sister and me. Some time afterwards, my father accompanied the late king on his royal progress

through Finland, and the girl aforesaid—it is really unfortunate that I have forgotten her name, whether it was Österlund or Åppelros, but that is indifferent—suffice it to say she had some little wealth, tried out of butter and tallow, and when my father happened to break his leg, that wise and by that time somewhat old girl thought the opportunity should not be neglected. She laid balsam on my father's sore leg, and he, in return, on her sore heart. In short, she gained her end, and became countess.'"

"Miserable slanderer!"

"No, above all things, no compliments! I was at that time only six years of age, and my sister four; but we were old enough to feel unhappy over a connection which made our father ridiculous. It is possible that the relationship between us and our step-mother was somewhat cool,—intimate it never became. But people can submit to anything, and we finally submitted to the honor of reckoning parsons, peasants and shopkeepers, in short, the whole plebeian mob, among our nearest relations. The new countess presented our father two children, a son and a daughter like ourselves, and it appeared to be growing really amicable between us. Meantime, I went abroad, my sister married, and our father, who is a very compliant man, ..."

"You revile even our father!"

"A little patience, if I may be allowed. Our father, who is a compliant man in his domestic concerns, submitted gradually, during our absence, to letting our intrepid step-mother rule and manage at Falkby as she pleased. One day I come back and find a lot of low, untasty arrangements, which savor half of hen-house, half of trading-booth, concerning which I have the impudence to express my humble opinion. That of course displeases, for this chambermaid, now the countess, ..."

"Say that once more, and, as true as you are a base

liar, I will send your right hand to keep company with the left!"

"Much obliged; in exchange for such proofs of friendship, I have a couple of playthings in my pocket. —So the countess naturally regarded my taste as greatly inferior to her own elevated views of hen-house architecture, and I remember that on that point we exchanged a few confidential words. I ventured even to doubt her absolute sovereignty, and such high treason was more than an empress from the kitchen regarded compatible with her new dignity. She then gave us a little surprise,—she ran away from Falkby last night."

"What? My mother!" exclaimed Paul, as with blanching face he sprung up.

"Yes, certainly. She probably thought that one of us two was rather superfluous, and, as it did not occur to me that it could be I, she looked upon me as a rebel, and resolved to abdicate."

"My mother?"

"Yes; was not that an *idé* which Maria Theresa or Catherine the second might have envied her? She walked, or rode, or rowed, I do not know exactly how, but suffice it to say she bereft us of her agreeable company without saying farewell. She decamped with a real *virtuosité*, which showed that it was not the first time she had in this manner honored the highway with her presence."

"Oh, my mother! My poor rejected mother!" lamented Paul, wringing his hands.

"Calm yourself,—all sovereigns are sensitive of power, and instead of ceding a single paragraph of her super-loftiness, instead of descending to the second step of the throne, to leave the first to our father, madame preferred to forsake house and home with an *éclat* which will not fail to create scandal, and dishonor that family which has done madame the honor of elevating her from the grocer's shop. I was, however,

needlessly generous enough to wish to screen her *faux pas* under the veil of a journey to Pyrmont, but my excellent brother has done everything that lay in his power to pull aside the veil and reveal his mistress-mother in all the reality of her natural agreeableness. He has succeeded, by the help of the mob, to which he has an inborn attraction,—and there, my young lord, you see what I have to answer to your caprices. You asked to find out the truth, and you have got what you asked."

"I thank you," replied Paul, in a broken voice. "Between your calumnies, I read only too plainly a terrible fact. She whom I love more than my life, whose lofty soul you, with all your worldly experience, are too base to comprehend, is now straying, rejected, unhappy and alone in the world. I now know all, and I shall act accordingly"

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON SWEDISH GROUND.

FALLING kingdoms, falling crowns, how similar everywhere is their fate! The bands loosen, the energies are thrown asunder, the wills are divided, the selfish links drop from the chain, and blow on blow falls from the hammer of Time against the dead walls of the law which fence in the whole. The tree is rotten, the sap is dried up, the storm comes, the branches crack; then there is a roaring and a gust of wind! With a noise as of thunder, the old oak falls, and great is the fall thereof.

That old oak was the kingdom of Sweden in the spring of the year 1772. It still stood upright,—to the

unwise it still seemed majestic and venerable, on that northern hill of snow, which it continued to call its own, and where its deepest roots spread out beneath the surface of the ground. But how the worms were gnawing its withered leaves, and how the wind was shaking its decaying crown! The kingdom was like a consumptive, whose remaining blood flows to the cheeks, to conjure forth the stolen roses of health, while the heart beats irregularly, and hands and feet grow numb with cold.

The diet continued in session. It was now in the month of April, and as yet there seemed to be no end to its long-winded disputes. On the contrary, they became more and more menacing, since the democracy had gained the supremacy, and threatened to swallow up the nobility, as the nobility had once swallowed up the royal authority. It was half of the old burgher-king's ideas,—a king and a people,—which had now come to power, and the question involved nothing less than the relegation of the whole aristocratic council. The honorable Caps stood, irresolute and pale with terror, before that specter they had themselves conjured to their aid. The still more honorable Hats quaked with horror, and clung, in their distress, with convulsive eagerness fast to the mast of the ship of state, which heretofore they had been so anxious to chop down and throw overboard. For them, there no longer appeared hope of rescue, except from the scoffed-at, the restricted, the mistreated royal power.

At that time there was gathered, one evening at one of the inns of Stockholm, that club of young noblemen which was known under the name of "Svenska Botten," and which for the greater part lived by allowances of French money. The club was a confused compound of all kinds of elements. By the side of full-blooded aristocrats of all grades, younger sons without inheritance and without future, most of them doing service as subaltern officers of the army, honest

minded but easily inflamed men and youths,* were seen dissipated gamblers, broken-down proprietors, ex-officers, dissatisfied intriguers, in short a strange mixture of good and depraved elements, with nevertheless a strong coloring of all the discontent which had for a long time been gathering against the ruling order of society, and whose particular tendency was, with the help of the king to overturn the existing order of things without clearly understanding what they should put in its place. It ought to be added that all the members were originally Hats, who were anxious above all else to put an end to the supremacy of the Caps, and thus about what in Poland would have been called a "confederation." The leader of the club was the afterward widely celebrated Jacob Magnus Sprengtport.

The youngest and most ardent of the gentlemen had for the present gathered around a steaming bowl in the guest room, where the smoke from fifty clay pipes rose in clouds toward the ceiling, while the more delicate of the company, who held tobacco smoke in abhorrence, discussed the questions of the day over a glass of Rhenish wine or lemonade, in side rooms. The time was rich in inflammable subjects, which could be kindled by a spark, and such were by no means lacking in this young and hot-headed club, whose purpose it was in an effective, and, if need be, forcible manner, to seize upon the political questions of the day.

From the animated, sometimes passionate exchange of words over the bowl, it might be concluded that something especially important was now on the carpet. As a beginning, the last number of the newspaper called "The Swedish Policeman" was read aloud, where the nobility was quite openly called traitors, robbers and

* Among them the following names well-known in Finland are to be found: De Caruall, Stalhandske, Pinello, Nordenskold, Von Becker, Creutz, Ramsay, Gripenberg, Boije, Finkenberg, Aminoff, Kulefelt, Rehbinder, Von Kothen, Lagerborg, Jägerskold, Essen, Vadenstjerna, Tigerstedt, Döbeln, Sprengtport, (J. M.), Ehrenrooth, Erenström, v. Gerdt, Tandefelt, Uggla, Konow, v. Schantz, De la Motte, Cederskjöld, Cremer, Nassakin, Cronhjelm, v. Christierson, Armfelt, Edelfelt, and Bentzelstjerna.

profligates, and where the Swedish nation was advised to follow the example of the Swiss as quickly as possible, and disburden itself of this plague.

A laugh of anger and scorn, mingled with threats, passed through that whole vociferous company.

"It is *the free-born* who speak!" burst out a young lieutenant, as he disdainfully threw the sheet aside. It accorded with the tune of the untitled to call themselves free-born, in contradistinction to the *high-born* of the land.

"Take care, Ffeiff," interposed another, "about paying your court to the rich burgher-lass near the wharf! Remember Burgomaster Sundblad's notion that such conduct is highly improper; the burgher-blood must be retained in its purity."

"And you, Gripenmarck," exclaimed a third, "be careful about seeking the office of territorial judge of Göinge; the peasants want to be sentenced by their peers to forty pairs of lashes."

"I propose," said the fourth, "that we hereafter carry a yard-stick, instead of a sword, at our side. It is modern, and can at all events do to kill dogs with."

"And I," put in an ensign, who had in vain shaved twice a week, without as yet being able to conjure anything but goose-down on his milk-white cheeks, "I propose that we decorate ourselves with wooden shoes instead of spurs, and hang a parson's ruff, like a weather-vane, on our backs."

"With a nightcap over the peruke!" added an auditor at the court-martial, provided with a wig which might have served as a model for the mane of the lion of Gotha.

"The devil take all the Caps!" exclaimed a florid, rude fellow of a captain, who was wont to go directly at the matter. "Let us go straight to the king, to-morrow, and request an end of the gossip. If not, I know what we ought to do with the Caps."

"Be good enough to impart your wisdom to us.

What is it we ought to do with the Caps?" inquired a sarcastic assessor, who preferred *détours*.

"Well, this way," said the captain, as he drew from his pocket a blue snuff handkerchief, tied the corners into knots so that it represented a cap, made with it a gesture which cannot be described, and then threw the improvised cap into the large open fire place, where it was instantly consumed by the flames.

A shout of applause from a part of the company answered this maneuver, which spoke only too plainly of their excited mood; but others were less pleased with it, and, going to the leader, begged him to divert precipitate determination.

Colonel Sprengtport was sitting in the side-room, absorbed in a confidential conversation with Count Bernhard Bertelsköld, who, wealthy, high-born, experienced and sagacious as he was, had immediately upon his first entrance occupied a prominent place among the leaders of the Hats.

"It will be as it is," said the colonel, with a low voice, in French. "You will do your best with the clergy. If we succeed in severing them from the rest, we have two houses against two, and the game is ours. If we do not succeed, we will then make an effort with the peasants. If that does not succeed, the game is desperate, and we must decide upon other means."

"You forget, my dear baron, that a third house is yet at our disposal, one that lives, moves, and has its being in money," said Bertelsköld.

"Do not flatter yourself ever to impose on the burghers," responded Sprengtport, with a shrug. "In the house of burghers is the natural home of the democracy. It will never content itself with less than the whole power, in order alone to dispose of the whole gain. As to yourself, my dear count, you can be assured of a seat in the council, but *not yet*."

"As you please. I am at your service."

Here the gentlemen were interrupted by the more

cool-headed of the club, who came to beg the leader to check the rising storm in the larger room. Sprengtport went out. His falcon eye glanced over the surging mass, and instantly grasped the danger of the situation.

"Gentlemen," said he calmly, but in a strong voice, before which the noise subsided, "we are here to deliberate about the rescue of our country, and not about party disputes. It is proposed to depose the council, *en masse*, and we are agreed that this would lead to the dissolution of the whole kingdom."

"Together with the nobility," murmured a few voices.

"Together with the nobility, that is true. And therefore the kingdom shall be saved *together with the nobility;* is not that the opinion of all?"

"That is true," was the cry from all points.

"On the eleventh of April the question comes up in the three lower houses; and it is now the eighth. If the gentlemen, for reasons which I cannot now present, but which will soon be manifest to all, will grant me three days' delay, in which to direct the business, I will promise that if we do not then succeed we shall all go in a deputation to the king, to request the dissolution of the diet."

"In three days it will be too late," objected some.

"In three days the club will perhaps have been dissolved," murmured others.

"On the contrary," said the leader, with a smile, "I have certain advices that the maintenance money of the club, which it has been threatened to discontinue, will be disbursed again the day after to-morrow."

"All right, we will wait!" was the reply, for the happy news of the maintenance had a remarkably tranquillizing effect.

"God save the king!" exclaimed the leaders.

"God save the king!" sounded quickly from the lips of all.

CHAPTER XIX.

CONSPIRATOR AGAINST CONSPIRATOR.

"YOU can be assured of a seat in the council, but *not yet*," repeated Count Bernhard Bertelsköld, with that mocking smile which he believed became him so well, and which he had not the least reason now to suppress, for he was sitting alone in his office, occupied with some letters which his *valet*, José, had just handed him. "Not yet? I am much obliged, my dear Baron Sprengtport. Without doubt, you have one of the best of heads, and, if you yourself are to be believed, are the most excellent conspirator that Sweden at present has the honor to show. But you forget that you might possibly have a rival in your noble art. You regard yourself as so utterly unsurpassable, and us other little mortals so solely created for halters, that you think it in your power to throw to us such little tid-bits, placed on *if* and *when*, as are used to make lap-dogs sit up. I really feel an irresistible desire to serve you some trick, if for nothing else than to give you a needed lesson in modesty. A seat in the council! That is, upon my honor, a *pauvre* offer in these times, even without conditions. There was only a 'not yet' lacking, to fall from the sublime directly into the ridiculous. And with what an excellent composure did I know how to look very serious when I replied, 'As you please; I am at your service!' I might have been taken for a grandee of Spain, holding the stirrup for a stupid prince. Truly, I am compelled to admire myself.

"But let me see," he continued, as with rapid hand he opened one after another of the letters on his desk.

"From my father? Of course the old complaining songs again. . . . Right. He is sick with sorrow and regret. No one can fill madame's place, of course, in seeing to the dairy, and taking care of the hens, and reading aloud in the evenings to *mon cher* papa. He has taken a governess for Vera—a Lady Sjöblad. Well, there is a name, at least. We must see that our old Celadon becomes enamored of her, and, some fine day, marries her. *Par hazard*, I have no fondness for step-mothers, but if there is no other means of getting that East Bothnian pitch-vapor out of the house, then *à la bonheur!* 'Paul is in Upsala, studying with a young man by the name of Thorild.'"

The countenance of Count Bernhard darkened. He hastily lighted the letter at a little spirit-lamp, which, solely for that purpose, was continually burning on his table. There was one word in the letter which burned his hand. He preferred not to read his brother's name.

"What do I see?" he continued, opening other letters. "From my lovely marchioness! And so perfumed! She invites me to a *soirée en famille* to-morrow evening. It would be cruel to wound her by a refusal. —From Lejonram! He solicits five hundred rix-dollars. Very well; he shall have a hundred. I may need him.—From Hägerflycht? He sends me a challenge *apropos* little Lisette. A bagatelle. We will breakfast together, and a glass of Tokay is all the satisfaction he will ask.—From Assessor Mannelin. He solicits my recommendation to the office of justice. Not bad! People begin to get an idea of my influence. We might make an exception of that plebeian ink-dauber, if for nothing else than to spite the club. —Aha! Provost Larsson! This is one of the fishes for which my ingenious leader has enjoined me to spread the net. As I might suppose, a whole sermon of four quarto pages. Let us skip three and a half to read the moral at the close.—Polished enough for such

a plump pork sausage," resumed the count, after he had glanced through the last lines. "The pious man, with the most humble obeisance gives me to understand that he is ready to declare the devil a saint, if his faithful services are only in due time rewarded with a bishop's crosier. But *for the present* nothing can be done. The house of clergy is like a runaway horse,—just hear how he flatters his reverend brothers in office!—and he himself is obliged *for the present* to howl with the wolves—he probably means the shepherds—until in the presence of the honorable lord count, and so forth, he can lay down his humble thank-offering of respect on the altar of fidelity.—Superb! The fellow has been pretty well paid by the Caps, but would like to keep retreat open, in the event that we should make a higher bid. *C'est fini*, my dear baron of the Svenska Botten! This gate you will not blow up with words. What do you want me to do? I will lay before you this precious dogmatic masterpiece, and you will comprehend that, in the case of the clergy, nothing remains for you to do but implore their absolution.

"However," continued the count, after some reflection, "I will as accurately as possible obey orders. So the time has now come to divide the peasants.—José!"

The *valet* came.

"Have you had the fellow from Badstu Street, in the southern suburb, called hither?"

"He is outside, awaiting the commands of your grace."

"Conduct him in!"

José departed, and immediately afterward returned with a young peasant of kind, honest, and resolute appearance. The count gave him a fleeting glance, and seemed surprised at his youth.

"Your name?" he asked.

"Jonas Bertila, representative from Storkyro," replied the peasant, without embarrassment.

"You are rather young to hold so important a trust," said the count, as he found it best to put more politeness into that careless tone.

"My constituents thought me old enough," replied the peasant

"Very well. You know the point at issue. There are persons who mean well by the peasants, and think they are altogether too highly taxed. Until the government taxes are diminished, an event probably not far distant, it is of importance to restrain the unreasonable claims of the clergy. As it now is, the shepherds are shearing the sheep to the bare carcass. That compensation grain, you understand . . . ."

"That was under discussion yesterday. But we peasants like best to plough and sow our own fields."

"Of course. But if some good friend assigns you a better plough, that ploughs deeper furrows, you see it is to your own advantage."

"That depends. We have a great many good friends now-a-days, and one must not judge the dog from the hare."

"Indeed. You are a Cap?"

"No, I am a Hat, if there must needs be a head-dress."

"So much the better. Then we think alike. Bertila? I remember having heard that name sometime."

"That may easily be, as I own the farm from which your grace's family originated seven generations ago, and have its name," boldly replied the peasant.

The count bit his lip. "That is possible," said he, in an indifferent tone, "and so much the more reason is it for our keeping together. The peasants do not agree to the proposal, you say?"

"No."

"I will tell you something confidentially, my friend. In that the peasants do *quite right.* They have so long danced after the piping of the lords, that they can now, at last, furnish their own music."

On the shrewd features of Bertila, it was seen that he did not give any too great credence to such words from a count.

"It surprises you?" continued Bertelsköld. "You would have more confidence in me, if you knew that I had lived abroad, among free people who have abolished all nobility, and found much good by it. To that, my dear Bertila, we too are to come. If, as a beginning, we get the aristocratic council out of the way, and supply its place from the common people, the rest will go like a dance; or what is your opinion?"

"I have no opinion," said the peasant.

"Can I depend on your secrecy?"

Bertila nodded.

"Well, to prove the honesty of my intentions, I will whisper something in your ear. The king acts as if he wished to take the part of the lords of the council, but secretly nothing would suit him better than to have the whole council cashiered. Regulate your conduct by that, you good peasants, and, whatever the lords wish to make you believe, have no compassion! Do you understand me now?"

"Perhaps. The voice is Jacob's, but the hands are Esau's."

"Farewell. If you need anything, apply to me. And remember what I said,—keep the peasants well with the clergy and burghers, then the council will decamp, and the power is yours!"

The peasant made a scrape with his foot, and went away, perplexed, however, at last, and uncertain how he ought to understand so unexpected an exhortation. Bertelsköld again threw himself back in the easy-chair, and laughed as heartily as was possible for him.

"Beautiful instructions!" thought he to himself. "Upon my honor, I would have given half a keg of gold to have had the whole of 'Svenska Botten' as audience, and seen the good patriot's amazement. My reconnoiterings with the clergy and peasants have suc-

ceeded excellently. I knew how to present the bait so roughly that the fishes felt the hook. The burghers now remain. My leader shall be content. We shall so upset them, that not only they, but the whole council, shall lose track of their plans . . . . José!"

The *valet* came.

"With these notes, you will go immediately to the wives of the burgomasters Sebaldt and Sundblad, and the wife of merchant Larsson. But be careful not to let them know who sent you. Keep a good countenance, and make them think that you come directly from Bishop Forsenius, or some other leader of the Caps. You will then take this note to the first door-keeper at the Great Church, and give him to understand that Baron Höpken, or some other leader of the Hats, sent you. Bear in mind that the first three notes come from the Caps, but the last from the Hats. It can do no harm to let a word about the king escape you, with door-keeper Östergren, who is a decided Hat, and consequently, for the time being, a royalist. Do you understand me?"

"*Señor* shall be satisfied."

"Very well. My good baron of 'Svenska Botten' shall also be satisfied with me."

CHAPTER XX.

THE BURGHER-WIVES.

AT that time, when such important matters were on foot, it would be a great mistake to suppose that the women were indifferent to the deliberations of their husbands. On the contrary, they followed the victories or defeats of the parties with almost as much attention as the real actors in the drama of the day,

and often, certainly, with more passion. At least it was said that more than one woman of the Cap party entertained decidedly unamicable feelings toward this or that one of her former female friends who had chanced to be chained by Hymen to a Hat, and on the other hand it was related that more than one lady of the Hat party carefully informed herself, when she hired a servant girl, how long the person in question had served in royal families, or if she could possibly be suspected of having imbibed bad principles during a previous service with some lady of the Cap party.

It was certainly rather strange that representatives from the country brought their wives with them to Stockholm, since in many particulars they might be looked upon as hindrances to the affairs of state, or as not the most trustworthy in the preservation of important state-secrets. But at the diet now in session, many exceptions to this rule occurred, both on account of the length of the session, which made the separation dubious, and especially from the fact that various festivities were to be expected at the impending coronation of the new king. A pardonable curiosity had thus brought together an unusually large number of representatives' wives, beside their husbands in the metropolis, and an explanation can perhaps thus be found why the session would never come to an end, and why the debates, which had possibly been practiced beforehand in the fluent little clubs of the domestic circle, now became unusually hot.

Among those representatives who sometimes shared their concern for the weal of the country with their better halves, was Thomas Larsson, the merchant from Vasa, whose faithful wife had not given herself any rest, until she had found an opportunity, the previous autumn, to leave her house in the care of her daughters, and come across to Stockholm herself, in order there, during the winter, to dissipate those clouds which the troubles of the country might gather on her good-

man's forehead. The burgher pair occupied a little house on Kungsholm, from which the husband every morning went in a kull-boat* across the river, to his important business, while his good-wife accompanied him to the Red Stores, or on her own responsibility jogged to the corn-market to make purchases for the day.

As her Thomas, however, often remained away until late in the day, and even the evenings were not secure from clubs and meetings, it happened that time often became tedious to good Mistress Larsson—(for the honest old "dear mother" with which she had been content in Vasa, was no longer good enough in refined Stockholm); and then she always found one or another "mistress" of burgher-rank, who, in the same situation, liked to talk away an hour over a two-öre ginger-cake, or, when elegance was attempted, over an Arboga ring-cake, with ginger preserves and sweetened water. And as these good burgher-wives, in their first innocence, had little idea of the difference between Hats and Caps, their morning conclaves for some time formed a neutral territory where politics had to give place to the more important questions about the price of butter and meat, about the best linen, the most careless servant girl, or the most reasonable grocery in their neighborhood.

That innocent time came to an end before winter, when the untitled estates began to lord it over the land. Their wives now heard daily so much about their husbands' importance to the state, and consequently also their own, that they themselves became fully persuaded that the fate of the realm depended on their dignified bearing. The burgher-wives would no longer yield to any of the aristocrats in the length of their triumphal jackets, in the red heels of their shoes, or in the immense bows on their caps; and when,

* A kind of boat rowed with remarkable skill by the Dalecarlian girls, and named after them kulla-boat, or kull-boat.

riding in their coaches like other folks, they met on the road to the hop-garden any of the titled "graces" in all their splendor, there might be two opinions as to who carried herself with more consciousness of her dignity, or with a more patronizing air condescended to greet the others. If ever the high-borne head of a burgher-wife now bowed lower than usual, it was before a bishop's wife, who had the honor of being untitled, or before the wife of Burgomaster Sebaldt, the speaker of their house, who, with her little, plump figure, and the incomparable self-satisfaction of the queen of a country, on such occasions did *les honneurs* for the whole body.

Old Mrs. Larsson, kind and thoroughly complacent, but occupied with her new importance, was now, on such a lonely Saturday afternoon, sitting over her cracknell and sweetened water, engaged in a confidential conversation with a good friend, about the effect which the expected discharge of the council might possibly have on Norrland linens and Danish flour, when a note on rose-colored paper was handed to her, brought, according to the declaration of the domestic, by a *valet* of Bishop Forsenius, the speaker of the house of clergy. Wondering what that right reverend leader of the Cap party could have to announce to her, old Mistress Larsson opened the perfumed epistle and read:

"HONORED AND WORTHY MADAM:—As without doubt, madam, you will not absent yourself from the Great Church, to-morrow, but will profit by the edifying sermon of Provost Wijkman, it would, for the situation of the country and the *reputation* of the untitled estates, be particularly encouraging, if you, honored madam, together with the wife of Burgomaster Sebaldt, and a few other estimable mesdames of the burgher rank, would be *gracieux* enough not to place yourselves in the ordinary seats of your rank, but in the seats of the wives of the councilors, which are *disponible*, and which it is hoped will soon stand always at the continual disposal of your honored self and your highly esteemed peers."

There was no signature. Good Mistress Larsson read and re-read this highly interesting note, but on account of the many and fine French words, could not exactly comprehend its contents. That there was a flavor of political ginger, she thought she perceived, as well as that burghers' wives were now to be advanced to the dignity of councilors', which was a kind of sugar in the bottom, and by no means seemed to her incredible. But as her Thomas was absent, and so important a matter merited mature deliberation, the old woman thought best in haste to clap on her most elegant holiday cap, and set out to call on the wife of Burgomaster Sebaldt, in quest of good counsel.

Arrived there, she found the wives of Burgomasters Sundblad and Hæggström before her, on the very same errand. After the women had with much ceremony taken seats, it was found that the wife of the speaker had received a similar invitation, though with the artful addition that "in the event that the honored madame should depend on the highly esteemed burgomaster's *consentement*, it was hereby wished, only in the greatest *confidence*, to have tendered the courteous *propos* that the honored madame and the other most highly esteemed ladies of her rank might be encouraged to occupy that rank and that place in the church, which by right ought to be ceded to them!"

That was something to think about! The powerful wife of the speaker was extremely taken up with so brilliant an idea as placing her little person in the seat of the councilors' wives, but thought it on the other hand very disagreeable, in such a lawful enterprise, to be thought to depend on her lord's and husband's '*consentement*.' "My Sebaldt," said she with great dignity, which was meant to be French but turned out to be Smålandian, "my husband is certainly a personage which at present can *embrassera* a councilor in each boot-leg, and the whole world knows that some day or other he is to be chancellor of justice; but that is not saying that he ought

to be a Christopher Tyrant in his house, and deny his consort a little innocent *amusement.* Do the ladies intend to beg their husbands' *protection* to *promener* into church, and *placer* themselves in whatever seat suits them?"

"I would have liked just to ask Thomas's opinion, but he was not at home," very modestly responded Mistress Larsson.

"My husband never has any opinion except mine," said Mistress Sundblad, with a jerk of the fiery red bow at her neck.

"And my husband," responded the wife of Burgomaster Hæggström, "always asks my advice in matters of state. It was only yesterday that we consulted about the wording of the royal assurance."

"That being the case," resumed the wife of the speaker, with all the solemnity of a protocolist, "probably none of our husbands will wish to *construere* our rights and privileges. But in order not to *dépendre* by their *consentement*,"—the words were spoken with an extremely French pronunciation,—"it would perhaps be *exécrable* not to *inventoríer* our husbands with a matter which does not concern them; or what do you think, ladies?"

Mistress Larsson entertained some scruples, but the majority accorded with the views of the speaker's wife.

"Are the instructions, then, that to-morrow morning, at nine o'clock, we *précedér-a* ourselves in the Great Church, and *confonder-a* our future situation?" further inquired the chairman.

"Yes, certainly," was the reply.

"If the ladies will please *abstraire* themselves into my house on the way, as I happen to live in Köpman Square, quite near the church, we can accompany each other's *conduit.*"

"Our most humble thanks for the privilege," replied the women, and with low courtesies withdrew.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SEAT OF THE COUNCILORS' WIVES.

"ARE you going to church to-day, my dear?" said Mistress Larsson, with the most innocent mien in the world, to her husband, on Sunday morning, after she had vainly tried all night long to get a wink of sleep, from anxiety over her unwonted and mysterious senatorial dignity.

"Haven't time," bluntly replied the husband.

"I mean to go to the Great Church, if you have nothing against it," added his faithful, well-trained wife.

"Indeed."

"Provost Wijkman is going to preach about the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. He is a nice preacher, and then so pathetic!"

"Indeed."

"We all need to be reminded about being humble, when such high dignities have been bestowed on us. Have you not a desire to hear Wijkman preach?"

"No."

"Why not, dear Thomas?"

"He preaches every day in the house."

"Can it be true that all the un-titled representatives are hereafter to be peers of councilors?"

"Nonsense!"

"But I have heard that all the representatives' wives are hereafter to sit in a more aristocratic place in church."

"Silly gossip!"

"But my dear. . . ."

"Let me alone."

The good wife knew what that signified. She did not venture to utter a word further about the important secret which lay on her heart, although it tried with all its might to get out. In her great anxiety, she resolved once more to call in the advice of the other women, so, putting on her most elegant wrap, she went to Mistress Sebaldt's.

Mistresses Sundblad and Hæggström were already there, engaged in a new conference with their speaker's wife. It transpired that the two first mentioned, quite as little as Mistress Larsson, had been able to keep the great secret altogether from their life companions, but both had been frightened to silence by their husbands' objections, before they had had time to reveal the whole importance and nature of the matter. All three, therefore, awaited the decisive judgment from the wise lips of the speaker's wife.

"I, for my part," declared the wife of Burgomaster Sebaldt, with much importance, "I, for my part have resolved to *obstruer* my husband an *agréable surpris*. He is so modified, my good Sebaldt, that he might perhaps, from sheer *modestie*, *céder* what the *estimé* estates of the realm please to insist upon for himself and us. I propose that we *posséder* our *situation*, as has already been said. Not for our own sake, heaven preserve us, but in order to *sauver* liberty and the country."

"Of course," put in Mistresses Sundblad and Hæggström. "The whole affair is to *sauver* liberty."

Old Mistress Larsson was silent. She was out-voted before she had yet ventured to open her mouth.

So all four of the women, tricked out in their best, betook themselves in marching order, with the speaker's wife at the head, to the Great Church near by, to hear Provost Wijkman preach about the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Before we follow the women further on their hopeful way to the dignity of councilors' wives, it will be in order to mention a note which door-keeper Östergren

of the Great Church had received the day before, and which he supposed had been sent him by Baron Höpken, the leader of the Hats. In this note, or order, as he regarded it, the door-keeper was informed how some women of the burgher rank were laying the presumptuous plan to crowd themselves during the next service of high mass into the seat of the councilors' wives, wherefore he, Östergren, must take necessary means and steps to prevent such effrontery. But in order to assure himself if the boldness of the untitled estates really went so far, he was advised in the first place purposely to leave the pew-door open, that it might be seen who they were that in this manner tried to defy all law and decency.

Nothing more was needed. Door keeper Östergren had been promoted to his present occupation, from the certainly honorable but more dependent office of *valet* to the greatest magnate of the realm, Earl Axel Fersen. Consequently that servant of the church was not only an out-and-out Hat, from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot, but if possible a still more inveterate aristocrat, who hated all the un-titled worse than sin, especially that rabble, as he expressed himself, who, in addition, had the impudence to be Caps.

Utterly ignorant of the danger threatening them, the women meantime arrived at the Great Church, and walked boldly in under Saint George and the Dragon. Divine service had not yet begun, and yet the church was already full of auditors who had come to hear a representative preach. As is usually the case during such a waiting before service, the thoughts of the congregation were for the moment of quite a worldly nature. Most of them passed away the time in staring at the new-comers, and making remarks on this or that one who tried to crowd into a full seat, or on others who would not make room, although the seat was only half full.

Nowadays, the custom in Stockholm is, that almost

all sittings are paid for in advance by a special pew-tax; and not until the pulpit-psalm begins, does the door-keeper unlock a part of the pews whose occupants have not arrived in time. At the period of this story, such rented pews were restricted to the nobility and high officers of state, together with the estates of the realm. Under the royal gallery, foremost to the right, facing the altar, were the pews of the councilors and their families; after them, other distinguished persons had their seats; and last of all, the estates had their carefully appointed places.

Inspected, like the others, as they walked forward, the women, with their speaker's wife in the lead, approached the ordinary pews for burghers; but to the great astonishment of all—among them Burgomasters Sebaldt, Sundblad, and Hæggström—went past, and in the consciousness of their importance, crowded on and on between the people in the aisles, until they had finally forced their way to the pew of the councilors' wives.

A couple of countesses were already sitting there in all their magnificence, but as the door was unlocked the wife of Burgomaster Sebaldt quickly turned the button, opened the door, and without hesitation walked in. The rest followed her, themselves amazed at their boldness, but with the firm resolve to peril everything "for liberty."

To depict the mien of the ladies already seated, or the astonishment of the rest, at this assurance unparalleled in the annals of Stockholm and the Great Church, would require at the very least the pencil of a Hogarth. The spectators nearest the intruders scarcely believed their eyes, and those farther away arose to their feet in the pews. If an ape had made its appearance in the royal gallery, it could not have brought about a greater church scandal.

"No, my dear friends, let us go out again!" en-

treated modest Mistress Larsson, extremely frightened and embarrassed at the commotion.

"We shall sit where we are," undauntedly replied the wife of the speaker.

Hardly was this said, before Door-keeper Östergren showed himself at the pew door, dark and terrible as Saint George's dragon.

"The mesdames will come out. This is the pew of the councilors' wives!" said that faithful guardian of the aristocracy's dignity, sufficiently loud to be heard by a hundred persons in the vicinity.

"The mesdames!" That struck the ear of the speaker's wife as the basest insult. But the women were deaf, and pretended not to hear.

"The mesdames will come out!" threateningly repeated the door-keeper.

The speaker's wife looked around. The burghers were sitting too far away to come to her aid; but notwithstanding this, she would by no means cede her rights, especially as the whole affair might be a misunderstanding.

"I am the wife of Burgomaster Sebaldt," she replied, in the certain expectation that whatever might happen to her sisters in misfortune, *she* at least would be allowed to remain in undisturbed possession.

"That is nothing to me. I say that the mesdames will come out!" once more repeated the inexorable familiar spirit, and when this, his third order, did not seem to have any better effect than the preceding, he without ceremony grasped one struggling woman after another by the arm, and led them out of the pew.

Three of them obeyed like frightened lambs, but not so the speaker's wife. "I will let you know, impudent fellow, that my husband is speaker of the house of burghers, and that I am *inventered* by Bishop Forssenius, and that the estates of the realm will have you put in the Rose-chamber!" exclaimed the thoroughly exasperated woman.

"And I shall put you in the stocks, madam, if you remain here and raise a church scandal! Will you get yourself out of the way, and hold your tongue?"

Blazing red with rage and shame, the women retreated from the church. Alas, alas, poor wife of the speaker! If all the congregation in the Great Church of Stockholm could have read your heart, as they became witness to your unprecedented defeat, what an immeasurable fall would they have discovered, from the topmost step of honor to the deepest valley of humiliation!

CHAPTER XXII.

MARCHIONESS EGMONT.

IN the evening of the same day when the burghers' wives were deposed from senatorial dignity, was the *soirée en famille* at the residence of Marchioness Egmont, on Drottning street. Like a brilliant meteor had this young French woman just arisen on the horizon, to throw all others into the shade. A widow somewhat over twenty years of age, survivor of an old colonel, she had a few years ago, at the residence of her husband's niece, the celebrated Countess Egmont of Paris, had the honor of being presented to the crown prince of Sweden; and whether it was that high acquaintance, or a desire to see the north, or merely a caprice—for what young lady in her position would not regard this last reason perfectly sufficient?—suffice it to say, the marchioness, during the last summer, had made a pleasure trip of some weeks to Sweden, and those weeks were not yet ended. She rented a hand-

some suite of apartments, surrounded herself with a luxury which was suggestive of enormous wealth, and beheld everything that Stockholm then possessed of aristocracy and brilliancy throng her *salons*. First, King Gustaf; next, his haughty but animated mother, the queen dowager; then all his court, his statesmen, his military men, the most prominent party leaders, artists, poets, literati, all singed their wings in this southern sun, or vied at least in showing her their homage,—all except a single one, and that was Queen Sophia Magdalena, the king's young, good, but timid consort. She alone could not be prevailed upon to allow this new charmer to be presented to her; far less had she condescended to honor her with a visit; and the ever-ready court gossip thought it very well knew the cause. It was said that the queen was jealous,—and not without reason.

Why, indeed, should the queen be the only one of her sex who did not secretly cherish such feelings? All young and many elderly aristocratic ladies were silently agreed that Marchioness Herminie Egmont might have been regarded as a passably well-formed and even not disagreeable personage,—if she had not had the bad habit of winking with her eyes, if the same eyes had not been of a too undecided color, if her nose had not been too large, her mouth too small, her hair too black, her complexion too brown, her form too full, her gait too dancing, her clothes too short, her feet too small, *et cetera, et cetera*. Could any one deny that she lisped? Was she not altogether too coquettish? Did she not like to be complimented? And then she laughed too much, and then she wept too much, and then she chattered too much, and then,—in short, she might, in the eyes of the ladies, have possessed all possible merits if she had not instead possessed all possible faults. Her greatest defect, of course, was that she ventured to charm all men, young and old, who came into her presence.

What had not already been told and lied about that lovely, gay French woman, because she did not walk, stand, sit, think, speak, weep and laugh precisely like all others! What calumnies had not already been set in circulation, what tender connections had not already been imputed to her, without a glimmer of proof as to their truth! And she knew it very well, but she laughed at it. She was like the shining swan of the fable, at which envy was continually throwing clods of dirt, but which merrily dived into the clear billows, and came up just as white as before.

She had now gathered around her a little circle of intimate friends, perhaps about a hundred persons. Here the Hats forgot their hat, and the Caps their cap; in the presence of the universal monarchy of delight the parties abdicated, and the noisy discord of the time seemed, like a drunken lackey, to have paused in the entry, with cloak upon his arm. In these brilliant halls of pleasure, around this charming fairy who playfully scattered the fragrance of flowers around her wherever she went, a morning beam of that sunshine was already seen which was soon to irradiate the days of Gustaf III. That was why the king thrived well there, just as the butterfly seeks the sunbeam; but the stiff, genteel ladies from the former moss-grown court, where every step was interpreted as politic, where every expression of frankness was a sin, and every conciliatory smile a protest against the diet contention,—they did not thrive well in the *salons* of Marchioness Egmont, although they visited them often enough from curiosity or "to rescue liberty."

One of "the intimate" in this select *societé* was Count Bernhard Bertelsköld, who had become acquainted with the marchioness in Paris, and had been the first to incite her to visit the north. Those who, with us, have seen that young man of the world only from a somewhat disagreeable point of view, would perhaps have been inclined to modify their

opinion if they had seen him in a drawing-room like this, among whose masculine ornaments he might with reason be reckoned. He there shone with all those qualities which make a man popular in social life. He was gay, entertaining, witty, and, when occasion required, even naughty. He was a good and inexhaustible story-teller, but never tedious; he was an adept in that delicate gallantry which never seems to flatter, and yet does flatter in every word; he had brilliant acquirements without seeming to know it; he was all eyes and ears for the one with whom he was talking; and, while a subtle calculation was concealed in each of his steps, he seemed never to fix the least attention upon himself.

But if, through all this, Count Bernhard was a perfect Frenchman, especially in the art of conversation, which then constituted the flower of the refined culture and social life of the time, in Marchioness Egmont he had found his superior. It was not that she surpassed him in wit, talents, or fluency; but with her was found that something which the count lacked,—that warm background which gives every object a bolder relief, and which can never be replaced by a glittering surface without depth. Like all others, the count had at first looked upon her as one of those ladies of the great world whose whole contents, like the flower vase, consists of the perishable bouquets with which they are from time to time ornamented. But he deceived himself. He there found something which defied all the keenness of his vision, and which he succeeded neither in penetrating nor outwitting, and that was a woman's heart.

But ought this to discourage him? What signified to him a woman's heart? Had he not a hundred times squeezed out such citrons, and afterward thrown them empty aside? But this singular French woman did not at all allow herself to be squeezed out. She seemed to have her heart on her tongue; and yet it was no

more to be captured than the moonlight in the fountain. Count Bernhard's vanity was wounded by that perversity. He made use by turns of the witty, the sentimental, or the persuasive *genre*, but all in vain. He shot away all the arrows from his quiver, and all, equally powerless, rebounded from that little, insignificant woman-heart, which seemed a prey for the first fop who cared to lay it at his feet, and yet mocked the most practiced wholesale dealer that ever traded in such wares.

Count Bernhard was not wont to retire beaten from the field. He secretly swore that he would have that enigmatical being, if for nothing but to punish her; and when this thought had once found a place in his diplomatic head, he made up his mind that on the whole it was not so bad. He said to himself that, leaving out of the question all the personal agreeableness of the subject, a marchioness with such rank, such wealth, and such powerful relations, both in Paris and Stockholm, was quite a suitable match. Well, what hindered him from transforming her to a Countess Bertelsköld? Nothing but the lack of her consent.

"*Nous verrons*," thought the count. "We shall see."

That evening the political fermentation was so strong in Stockholm that not even the drawing-room of Marchioness Egmont could preserve its noted neutrality. While, nearest to the marchioness, some were singing and dancing, or, with mingled delight and shrugs, were listening to a declamation from the opera "Thetis and Pelée," first conjured forth by Gustaf III, a shadow of the time's dark cloud fell on the more remote parts of the *salon* and side-rooms, where some gentlemen of "Svenska Botten" were secretly discussing the questions of the day with their leader, Baron Sprengtport.

"The three days are past," said they to him, "and the situation is every moment becoming more threatening. What ought we to do?"

"Wait," was the reply.

"Frederick Aminoff has just met persons who had come from the clubs of the Caps. The demagogues make the most insolent speeches, and openly declare that the nobility ought to be exterminated. The peasants grumble, the burghers double their fists, and the clergy ring the alarm-bell like madmen. We must do something,—but what?"

"Wait."

"Wait? That is impossible. The rabble is furious. The council will decidedly be lost in the ballots of to-morrow, and, the day after, we shall see provosts, burgomasters and jurymen flaunting in the seats. Do you really believe, baron, that we can behold all this spectacle with folded arms? What, in Heaven's name, shall we do?"

"Wait!"

An unusually noisy laughter from a circle farther away interrupted the speakers. It was Count Bertelsköld, telling the story about the mishap of the four women at the Great Church.

CHAPTER XXIII.

STORMING A HEART.

THE anecdote about the four women was very timely. All thought it extremely pleasant that burgher haughtiness had finally succeeded in arousing a general church scandal, and all vied in making the poor women the objects of their stinging witticisms.

"The frog in Lafontaine's fable could not have done it better," was the opinion of some.

"The ladies always have the privilege of expressing the opinion of the gentlemen," said another.

"And suffering for it!" suggested a third.

"The congregation ought to have arisen and sung Te Deum," mockingly responded others.

"The more so, as Provost Wijkman is said to have preached, on the same occasion, a very edifying sermon about the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven," said Count Bertelsköld.

"Next to burghers' wives, provosts are indisputably the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven."

"But why did they not let the *bourgeoisie* remain?" asked the young hostess of the day, with an impatient little toss of her handsome head.

"Why!" responded Bertelsköld. "Because not all ladies content themselves with ruling only by their charms. The ladies of the *bourgeoisie* had, in the church door-keeper, a cavalier who was perfectly suited to them, and who gave them all the civility they were capable of comprehending. Admit that he rendered them a real knightly service. If he had not to-day obliged them to deprive the councilors' ladies of their agreeable company, they would next Sunday have honored the royal gallery with their presence."

"And what if they did?"

"Enter the royal gallery?"

"Yes, why should they not? Are not all equal in the presence of the King of Kings? Ought not all places in a church to have the same rank?"

"My lady, who is elevated above all rank, can say that," replied the count, "but we other weak mortals suffer from certain prejudices. We think, for instance, that a yard-stick is hardly suitable for a scepter."

"Are you sure of that? I remember that a merchant's family, by the name of Medici, made a not bad beginning on the throne. And for the rest, if the *bourgeoisie* do make their reverence to us on the street, or in our hall, because we wear a title, in what law is it written that we are to carry our vanity to the foot of the Almighty's throne? Do you really believe, my

dear count, that posterity is going to look on our high places in church with the same solemn earnestness as do we? And when we go so far in our profound reverence for power that we call our dead princes and kings *most highly blessed*, has it never occurred to you that some day there will be a smile of undying ridicule at such foolishness?"

"You are Rousseau's countrywoman, my lady; you have a right to be a rebel."

"No, pardon me, Rousseau was born in Geneva, a little point of the world which has the honor of being a commonwealth like Sweden. The difference is only that in Geneva genius is honored with royal demonstrations of honor, while in Sweden the lament is that there is a genius on the throne . . . . Will you allow me?"

And, with that untroubled freedom which the Swedish ladies of that old time regarded as so improper, the marchioness took his arm.

They promenaded through the drawing-room, and sat down in the half obscurity of a magnificent dimly-illuminated cabinet.

"Now or never!" thought Count Bernhard. In vain had he lavished phrases of all sorts on this capricious being. He must invent something new.

"Madame," said he, "you are truly the worst rebel I know. It is not enough that you defy the tenderest admiration of a man who adores you. You are able to defy a whole kingdom."

"Really? Is that intended for a compliment?"

"As you please. You pretend to be a democrat, and you are conspiring for royal authority.'

"I?"

"You, yourself. You have honored Sweden with a visit merely to overturn what you call its republican form of government, and again place on the throne an absolute king."

"Ah, my lord, you really do me altogether too much honor."

"I am perfectly in earnest. All the world knows that you are just as dangerous as lovely. But all the world does not know that you are a political character. Pardon me for venturing to be the first to tell you of it."

"No, what is it you say? I a political character? Why, that is excellent I admire your keen sight, but you would lay me under great obligation if you would please impart to me something more about your important discovery."

"In the first place, you possess all the qualities required for a political intrigue. You are as intelligent as you are beautiful, as enterprising as you are intelligent, and as shrewd as you are enterprising. Incredible as it may appear, you are even able to keep a secret. No one suspects you, and you have all possible liberty to put yourself in connection with all parties, just as you gather around you a life-guard of all possible colors, but who are all agreed about blindly obeying your least signal. Have I guessed rightly?"

"Continue! I am extremely interested to learn all my merits."

"You are preparing for a political *coup*, madame. And why should you not venture the same which so many beautiful ladies before you have ventured and carried out? 'Providence would be too immediate in its effects if it permitted a revolution to come to pass without the aid of women and clergymen.' I do not, however, assume to play the *rôle* of a father-confessor. You are a personal friend of Countess Daschkoff, to whom Catherine II. is indebted for the throne. I am sure she has given you the best advice—for instance, to assure yourself of the royal guard, or 'Svenska Botten.' But nevertheless I must warn you, madame, for you are on a fair way to—the cloister or the scaffold."

The marchioness fixed on the speaker her small, mischievous, brown eyes, and a sarcastic smile curled her fascinating lips. Count Bernhard thought he observed, however, that the roses on her cheeks lost color, as she said with a nod:

"Go on! Your story is becoming more and more romantic."

"You have calculated upon everything, madame—except those eyes which have seen through you. One little mistake is sufficient to destroy the effect of all your rare qualities, and you are not altogether faultless. Allow me to say that you are very imprudent."

"Ah! At last a shady side to my political personality!"

"Yes, you are indiscreet. You ought not to have ridden yesterday to Haga, under the pretext of an excursion. It has been discovered that you have had secret meetings with the king. And on the return home you ought not to have let your horse run away, in order to shut yourself indoors all day yesterday, under the pretext that you had been overcome with terror at the accident, or perhaps injured by a fall."

"You are well informed, I see. Saladin, my young Arabian, was frightened by an old woman who was bringing pine boughs to town, and I was really almost thrown from the saddle. The reason why I was not cannot interest you. You there see why I could not receive visits yesterday. But, as you observe, I am so far recovered to-day that I can without danger continue my course to the cloister or the scaffold."

"Once more, madame, I am not your father-confessor. Neither have I ever doubted your courage, but I doubt your success. Do not depend on the king. All his chivalry will not prevent his forsaking you when his crown has need of a sacrifice. Associate yourself rather with a man who will never forsake you, and who will regard it an honor to serve you, when by that means he can make the fortunes of his country."

"How? You would be magnanimous enough to enter into political partnership with a person who to-morrow, perhaps, will be charged with high treason?"

"Listen to me, madame! I belong to a party whose fate, for the present, is nearly connected with that of the king, and which will therefore make every effort to win success for that very plan of which we have been speaking. The Hat party now stands or falls with royal power. *Without* us, neither you nor the king has the power to bring about a revolution. *With* us, on the other hand, everything is practicable. Neither is it probably unknown to you that I possess an influence which can benefit or injure according as it is employed for or against. So—I will not importune you with a declaration of love, although it is in your power to make me the happiest of mortals, but permit me to show myself worthy of your friendship!"

"And if it does not please me to grant you that, then you will of course become my bitterest enemy?"

"Why so? Let us be perfectly candid. You are young and charming, but you are also ambitious, and I do not censure you for a fault which you share with all exalted souls. Well, madame, I offer you everything that a legitimate ambition can find desirable in life. You shall subvert a wretched form of government, and in its stead place a model for all ages. You shall rescue a young king, who has only one single fault, which is that he cannot belong to you, just as you cannot belong to him, and you shall merit the admiration not only of Sweden but of all Europe. All this I offer you, if you . . . . "

"'. . . . Will fall down and worship me?'"

"I did not believe that the book you quote would be found in your library. It is I who will adore you, madame! All this I offer you if you will bestow on me this lovely hand, which the whole world might envy me."

For a few moments the marchioness was silent; then,

lightly as a bird, she sprung to the flowers at the window, and came back smiling with a little basket full of grapes.

"Have the kindness, *Monsieur le Comte?* You are heated—you need something with which to refresh yourself."

"Marchioness!" whispered Count Bernhard, as a flush of anger overspread his cheeks, and all his diplomatic self-possession was on the point of failing him, "I am not to be jested with, unpunished!"

"The idea of my jesting with you! What do you think of me? Sit down, I beg you. I have reserved an agreeable little surprise for you, and it was on that account that I took the liberty to bring you hither. I believe I told you that yesterday I came near being thrown from the saddle. A young man then suddenly darted forward, and at the risk of his life stopped my running horse. I wonder if you can guess who my rescuer was?"

"I never guess riddles, madame."

"It may nevertheless interest you, as it did me; for that young man gave me his company yesterday while I was alone, and had the goodness to be very candid with me. Why, *Monsieur le Comte*, do you guess nothing? You are not even jealous? There, you must put off that ugly look, for it is not becoming to you, and you shall instead make the acquaintance of that young man, you know. He is a lovable youth, I assure you. Judge for yourself!"

With these words the marchioness opened a little side door and said:

"Have the goodness to come out, monsieur. Some one is here who wishes to make your acquaintance."

A young man, clad in black, stepped out into the dim light.

"Paul!" exclaimed Count Bernhard, blanching.

It was Paul.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HATE AND LOVE.

AT the same moment that Count Bernhard recognized his brother, he understood that the marchioness was initiated into their family secrets. He believed he knew why she had refused the offer of his hand. Perhaps she had already given her heart to Paul, as a reward for the knightly service he had had the happiness to show her. Very well; she should also share that hatred which Count Bernhard bore in his heart, and which rapidly grew, like thistles above roses, far higher than that transient emotion he had just called love.

Coldly and haughtily he bowed, and, without saying a word, departed.

The marchioness turned to Paul, who, mute and pale, had paused at the door.

"I have now paid a part of my debt to you," said she, with an ardent look. "Your brother a moment ago asked my hand, and I reached him this basket. He now hates me just as cordially as he does you, and I am glad of it, for through that I shall perhaps acquire some right to regard you as my friend."

"How is it possible to hate you?" said Paul, in a low voice.

"I might be able to answer you," responded the marchioness, "that hatred never finds a more open door than in a slighted love. But that would be doing your brother's feelings too much honor. Wounded vanity, I should say. Such are men. They overwhelm us with flattery, only to chain us as trophies to their own triumphal car. They say to us, 'You will make

me the happiest of mortals!' Possibly! But *our* happiness or unhappiness does not trouble them in the least. If they were wise, they would at least try to deserve our respect. But they imagine that we are perfumery bottles, and of no use except to scent their own divine self-satisfaction. They treat us like fans, to be spread or folded at pleasure, and whose whole significance is a puff of wind. You are still so young, monsieur, you have not had time to learn that, and so I can be candid to you. But you too will learn to play with the hearts of women, and remember then what I tell you: we are not all dolls of porcelain. We are neither lap-dogs, to be coaxed with lumps of sugar to sit up, nor kittens, to be enticed by a string to follow. We demand, my lord, to be treated like thinking beings!"

In that moment, Marchioness Egmont was beautiful and proud. Her cheeks burned, her eyes flashed, she forgot everything in the subject which interested her. Paul could not turn his eyes away from her. He was enraptured, he was mute with admiration. Poor boy! His heart had as yet flamed only for his mother and his books. He had been free as the bird in the forest; but now—now his wings were for the first time singed.

Why should he also meet, of all others, this dangerous woman, when he had come to Stockholm from Upsala to follow up the one trace which he believed he had found of his lost mother? Why should he check her running horse? Why should he accept her invitation for the following day, and spend almost the whole of that day alone with a siren, who was able within ten minutes to turn the head of old inured statesmen far more than that of a young enthusiast like him? And why should he at last allow himself to be tempted by her charming French frankness, into answering with the same candor, and confessing to her everything that lay upon his heart? Useless questions! He did not ask him-

self. His thought stood still, and, like the moth, he rushed blindly toward the light.

"But I am altogether forgetting why I requested your presence this evening," continued the beautiful enchantress, after a little pause. "The other half of my debt remains to be paid. Monsieur de Bertelsköld, I beg the honor of presenting you to his majesty!"

"Me?" inquired Paul, confused and taken by surprise.

"And for what other reason should I have been so uncourteous as to keep you waiting here in my cabinet? We must make use of the occasion. It is an idea which occurred to me yesterday, after you had gone. His majesty has been gracious enough to promise to honor my *soirée* with his presence, this evening at eleven o'clock, and it now lacks only a quarter of an hour. Unfortunately, I could not avoid inviting your brother, and I wished to spare you a meeting, which, if it had occurred in the presence of many, would have been painful. You thus see why I wrote you, begging you to have the goodness to enter by the little staircase to my inner room, and why I was obliged to make you wait so long. But now, since your brother has given me his displeasure, and freed us both from his presence, nothing hinders me from begging you to be welcome among the rest of my guests. You will there find your sister, Baroness Clairfield. I must only add the request that you go down again, and approach the drawing-room by the large stairway, for I need not tell you what the consequence would be if a young man, who had not been presented to the company, was unexpectedly seen to emerge from my inner apartment . . . . . "

And the beautiful marchioness nodded as kindly, as confidentially, as though they had been acquainted for many years. Paul no longer had any will. He promised to obey.

"Then *au revoir!*" she whispered, and disappeared.

Meantime Count Bernhard, proud and smiling, as

from a triumphal march, had retired through the *salon*, and was just on the point of disappearing, when a hand was laid on his shoulder, and Colonel Baron Sprengtport stood beside him.

"One word, lord count!"

"At your service, my dear baron!"

"I have just received the sixth report this evening from the clubs of the Caps. They are beside themselves with fury, among other things over the insult this forenoon offered to four women of burgher rank. This event could not have occurred at a more unfortunate moment. It is claimed that the whole affair was an artful intrigue, with false missives, purposely to insult the non-titled estates, and this drop has heaped the measure. I wonder if you happen to know anything about such an intrigue?"

"I have heard the story from my *valet*, who, Catholic as he is, amuses himself in going to church in order to stare at the young ladies. It is a bad habit which he brought with him from Madrid An intrigue, you say? Of what use would that have been? Those good ladies of the *bourgeoisie* needed no encouragement. They are pretentious enough."

"A couple of those spurious anonymous letters, however, have been circulated at the clubs, and the matter is thus, without any doubt, a *coup de main*. Do you want to know my opinion about it?"

"It would interest me immensely."

"I believe you are the one who brought that about."

"That is *charmant*. And for what reason, if I may venture to ask?"

"You probably know that better than I. You have miscarried in everything you have taken upon you to accomplish."

"Pardon me, my dear baron; I serve you from pleasure, but not from duty, and so do not like reprimands from you. For the rest, I suppose you have read Provost Larsson's reply."

"You are a turn-coat, sir count!

"I beg to be excused . . . . . "

"You are a traitor to our party, which for the present is also the king's."

"That is enough, sir baron. If it is your intention to seek a quarrel you might have chosen a more seasonable occasion. But as you please; I am at your service."

"Thank you. You have luck in love, sir count; therefore you have ill-luck in play. The marchioness might be inconsolable if any harm should happen you. At least, so you imagine."

"Oh!" said Count Bernhard, with his mocking laugh, which was enough to irritate a stone, "I really believe, baron, that you are jealous. I ought to have guessed that, when you fell upon me so without rhyme or reason. If I can serve you with *so little*, I will with the greatest pleasure cede my place with our amiable hostess. As you may have observed, I have had no reason to mourn over her coldness. But easy victories have never been to my taste. I hand over my laurels to the leader of 'Svenska Botten.'"

"What? Can it be you are venturing to insult Marchioness Egmont?"

"I believe it was yourself who regarded me as lucky in love. And which of us is it that has been uttering insult after insult?"

"Very well. Fix the time and place of meeting!"

"In Solna forest. My time is somewhat occupied, but to-morrow, at ten o'clock, after I have breakfasted, I think I might find a half-hour's leisure to dispatch a crazy baron."

"To-morrow? That will not do. We must both live until after the votes of the day. Suppose you say day after to-morrow?"

"As you please."

"The weapons?"

"Pistols."

"*Au revoir*, sir count!"

"*Au revoir*, sir baron!"

"His majesty, the king!" was at that moment announced by a *valet*, and the noise in the drawing-room hushed as by magic. The attention of all was directed toward the great entrance.

CHAPTER XXV.

KING GUSTAF III.

THE doors were thrown open, and the king entered. He was met by the hostess, who accompanied him all the way from the upper step of the great staircase.

Gustaf III was at that time twenty-six years of age, and was still encircled by all the charms of youth, which never wholly deserted him, even when years and anxieties had befogged his life. The high, open forehead, surrounded by light curls, brushed back, slightly powdered, and terminating in an extremely careful peruke—the large blue eyes, with their extraordinary luster,—the delicately formed features, whose reputed irregularity was scarcely observed by any except those who were seeking for defects,—the fine, smiling lips, with their expression of goodness,—the fair, almost feminine, complexion,—the high-borne and yet ever moving head,—the peculiar casting of the neck, which was so characteristic,—the motion with the handsome jeweled hands, encircled by their frills of lace,—the animated, but always dignified, agreeable and expressive mimicry, which accompanied every word and gesture,—the easy, artless bearing, which never for a moment, however, forgot itself,—altogether presented a picture which no one who had once seen it could ever forget. But in it lay the fascination of genius, which can never be imitated, that undying

effulgence which can never be dimmed by trifling spots, and which irresistibly rules humanity against its will.

What has not already been said about the external appearance of this king! How eagerly has every shadow been hunted out that could darken his image in the eyes of posterity! How have his form, his gestures, his words been caricatured, just as have been his historic personality, his character and his human worth, from the duplexity in his face and the bows in his costume, to the duplicity of his conscience and the ostentation of his government! What signifies all the dirt that has been scattered on his elegant silken jacket, to the abyss of degradation into which it has been desired to push his moral character! There is scarcely any crime in existence so black, any infamy so shocking, that it has not impudently been trumped up against this king. All that fancy can depict that is dark and horrible, all that the moral sense most deeply detests, all the most despicable which has ever been the object of a despot's desires or a lazar's wretched lusts,—of all these has Gustaf III been believed to be capable, and if it was not possible to invent anything still more terrible or repulsive, the fault lay not with those who have thus depicted him, but only in the imperfection of the power of human imagination, which was unable to devise either stronger colors or more infamous motives.

And yet he now entered into this handsome *salon*, utterly unconscious of the terrible *rôle* of a Nero, a Caligula, a Heliogabalus, which was some day to be offered him in the history of his country. Not the least trace of blood was seen on his milk-white hands. No venom dripped from his curling snake-like locks. From the pocket of his blue silken coat protruded no hilt of any concealed dagger. No insolent glance from his blue eyes hinted of a tyrant, who in cold blood murdered the honor of men and the innocence of women. No secret door was opened, in order, at a

signal from him, to bury an enemy in eternal captivity. How well he could disguise himself, that faithless "comedian!" Over his whole being lay such an illumination of happy dignity, that immediately upon his entrance the wax-lights seemed to burn more brightly, the large mirrors to gleam with greater splendor, the flowers in the window to exhale a sweeter fragrance, and a glow to spread out over the whole *salon*. And as all plants lean toward the light, so the eyes of all present followed his easy, graceful walk through their respectfully yielding ranks.

He dispensed a greeting in every direction with a bow. His least look was eagerly caught, and every word from his lips was listened to like a sweet sound. All felt as though spell-bound, and yet free, sorrowless and delighted.

Was this the despot of whom we read in so many partisan books? "No," answers the echo of the times, "*not yet*. He was only going to become that, before long." Did he become that? No one, in April, 1772, knew a word of reply.

The salutation on both sides was conformable to the rigid models of etiquette and the dancing-school. There was much ceremony in familiarity itself. During the time of liberty, the king's *dignity* was to make up for everything lacking in the king's *power*. His acting chamberlain accompanied him even in the private evening circle, and two pages at the door awaited their royal master's commands.

"I come late, but do not let that disturb you in your govermental cares, my dear marchioness," said the king, in that complaisant and merry tone with which he usually addressed ladies of the higher *societé*. "You have your whole court gathered around you, I see. Truly you are to be envied. You reign supreme, and yet you have not a single rebel in your realm. But what news from Paris? I hope your charming aunt is well?"

"As well as one can be, two hundred *lieus* from your majesty,' replied the marchioness, in the same tone. "My aunt is not so old yet as to lose her memory, and she thinks with regret of last winter, when she had the honor of quarreling with your majesty."

"Neither can I ever forget our skirmishes," responded the king, greatly animated by the agreeable memory. "Next to Countess de la March, I had no more formidable enemy in Paris than Countess Egmont, and, I may add, no more faithful friend. Those charming ladies, you may believe, charged hard upon me for what they called my absolute sympathies. People are nowhere so free-minded, you know, as in Paris. People are always dreaming about what they do not themselves possess. A more decided republican than your aunt, I have never seen. It was in her box at the theater that I received the sad news from Stockholm, and how do you suppose she consoled me? She cautioned me against an absolute monarchy."

"Pardon her, your majesty! She ought to spend this winter in Stockholm in order to correct her opinion."

"Do you think so? But yet Paris is always Paris. I will present you a most charming pair of samples, which I just received by post. Do you remember the young Vestris, the dancer with the exquisite legs, son of his father? He writes in real earnest, and proposes to me to engage a ballet-corps in Stockholm. And pretty little Morelli (daughter to the late king's *premier-danseuse*, who helped dedicate 'China,' and was afterward poisoned by her rival in Bologna), what do you think she has in mind? She wants, *partout*, to come here and dance at the coronation!"

"It would do no harm if your majesty engaged her as teacher of the terpsichorean art, for instance for the house of burghers . . . . But will your majesty have the goodness to be seated? We have a little, very unpretentious *pas de printemps*. It is an old *nouveauté*,

which is said to have been danced in Stockholm more than thirty years ago, at Count Tessin's."

"At Count Tessin's? Ah! I remember having heard it spoken of. It was then that the late queen fainted, when she recognized Lady Taube. It was also then that the part of Spring was danced by a pretty little *parvenu*, a girl from the *bourgeoisie*, who is said to have juggled away Lady Stenbock's costume. She was afterward married to a Count Bertelsköld, father to our Spanish chevalier. Count Tessin once related it to me, at the time when he and I were intimate friends."

"Ah!" exclaimed the marchioness, visibly surprised, "I was just intending to beg the favor of presenting before your majesty a young person who, if I mistake not, is a son of the same Count Bertelsköld, in his later marriage with the person mentioned."

"Ah me! my dear marchioness, when a lady at your age interests herself in a young man, it may be wagered that she has extremely urgent reasons for it. I hope he is ugly, one-eyed, hump-backed, or at least a magister, for then the rest of your adorers can be calm."

"Your majesty will perhaps be gracious enough to judge for yourself. Here he is,—Count Paul Bertelsköld."

The king gazed with pleasure at the slender, handsome young man, who, in his simple black costume, with the timid flush on his cheeks, and the dark, sad, dreaming eyes, resembled rather the hero of a tragedy than the gallant and strutting officer of the guards whom his majesty had probably expected.

"Madame," said Gustaf III, smiling, and with his inimitable grace, "I pity your adorers!"

"I venture to believe that your majesty, for the first time in his life, is mistaken," replied the beautiful marchioness, concealing with her fan a treacherous

witness on her cheeks, which had not yet forgotten the art of blushing.

The king continued with pleasure to look at the young man. The beautiful in life attracted him wherever he met it, and it has been observed that all the favorites of Gustaf III were handsome men.

"Have you any wish that lies in my power to fulfill!" he asked of Paul. "I know your father and your brother. It would be a pleasure to me to see you occupying a place at court."

"I am grateful to your majesty," replied Paul. "What I at present most earnestly wish, it is not in your majesty's power to fulfill."

"And what is that?"

"To find my mother again."

"Who knows? You must tell me about that. After a fashion, I also know your mother."

CHAPTER XXVI.

SIGNS AND WARNINGS.

THE third day after the scenes described in the preceding chapter, Paul Bertelsköld, early in the morning, was sitting in his humble room on Little New Street in Stockholm, when a letter was brought him which had arrived from Upsala by post the evening before. He recognized his father's handwriting, broke the seal, and with mingled feelings read the letter. It contained, together with information about the monotonous life at Falkby, a multitude of fatherly counsels, among which was that Paul ought without delay to become reconciled with his brother Bernhard,

as the enmity of the brothers would otherwise lay their father in the grave.

"And not a word about my mother!" sadly sighed the young man.

But he deceived himself. On the third page of the letter, there was a postscript which he had not at first observed.

"Dear son," wrote the count, with an embarrassment and an emotion which could easily be read in every line, "I ought not to leave you in ignorance that we have had a letter from the countess, your mother. It came by post from Stockholm, and stated that her health was good, and that she every day included us all in her prayers. She writes that we must not try to search out her place of abode, that she is living with good people, and lacks nothing except the blessedness of once more in life embracing us, all of which she lays in the hand of God the Almighty. She says she often receives intelligence about us, although I truly do not comprehend how that is possible. For you, she seems to be filled with many anxieties, but expresses her satisfaction over Lady Sjöblad's method with Vera's education, and on that point gives precise directions. Lady Sjöblad is also a very amiable and intelligent person, upon whom perfect dependence can be placed. Farewell, dear son."

There was something at the conclusion which Paul did not exactly like. But what signified that compared with the great and to him exciting news of a letter from his mother! So she still lived! This certainty alone could not be repaid with a mountain of gold. She lived, submissive to her fate; her memory was active, she thought of her children! O, where, where then did she live, and why did she not come to wipe away the tears of her son, the only one on earth who was ready for her sake to sacrifice everything?

A little *apostille*, in childlike French, from Vera, accompanied the letter:

"Sachez, mon très cher frère, que notre mère nous a écrit et qu'elle se porte bien, quoiqu'elle pleure tous les jours notre absence et prie le bon Dieu de nous garder. C'est que j'avais parfaitement raison, n'estce pas, qu'elle n'était nullement partie, qu'elle reste encore près de nous, et qu'elle reviendra un jour nous embrasser, si nous sommes très sages et trés obéissants. Quant à moi, je ferai mon possible, et vous le ferez mille foi mieux que moi. Sachez aussi, que mon pére m'a donné, le jour de ma naissance, un autre petit agneau, qui se nomme Bibi, au lieu de mon pauvre Bijou, qu'on m'a si affreusement tué, et il est tout blanc, c'est à dire que la tête seule est toute noire comme le pot de Tall Karin, vous vous en souvenez. Adieu, mon plus chèr ami, je vous baise soixante dix fois votres moustaches, si vous en avez quelques uns, et je suis votre très petite, très sotte et très obéissante soeur

VERA BERTELSKÖLD."

Paul kissed the letter. "We two shall cling together in life and death," said he silently to himself. But how was he to profit by the hints these letters contained about his mother's place of abode?

Some one touched the latch of his door. It opened, and in stepped one of those ragged beggar children who in great numbers ran about the streets of Stockholm. It was a girl of the same age as Vera, and that resemblance touched Paul's easily moved heart. Before the girl had yet piped forth the ordinary whining entreaty for a farthing, Paul had reached her a silver coin, which, for his purse, was a not insignificant offering.

The girl courtesied, and silently reached him a piece of coarse paper He unfolded it, and to his further astonishment read:

"Hasten immediately to Solna forest. Your brother's life is in danger."

There was no signature, and the hand-writing was unfamiliar.

"Who sent you?" inquired Paul.

The girl indicated with a gesture that she could not answer. She was deaf and dumb.

"If that is the case, you will remain here in my

room till I come back," Paul motioned, and immediately took his hat to hasten to Solna. Let the summons come from whomsoever it might, he must obey it for what he regarded two strong reasons: it concerned his brother, and that brother was his bitterest enemy.

But in the door he met Marchioness Egmont's French waiting-maid, little Babette, of whom rumor said that she knew more about her mistress's secrets than a waiting-maid really ought to know. She courageously placed herself in the way of the swiftly departing Paul.

"One word, monsieur!" said she, with the abrupt assurance of a favorite who does not allow herself to be deterred by any hindrances.

Paul stopped.

"Madame begs that monsieur will have the goodness to call on her immediately. Her carriage is waiting at the door."

"I will come in an hour or two. For the moment it is impossible," replied Paul.

"Pardon me, madame begs me to add that monsieur ought not to lose a moment. It is of the greatest importance."

"Have you any idea, Babette, what it is about?" and a gold coin, his only one, was slipped into the hand of the waiting-maid.

"I do not know. Probably some tapestry pattern, which madame wishes to consult you about," replied Babette, with mischievous mien.

Paul hesitated. He looked around after the deaf and dumb girl, but she had disappeared. For the second time he took a hat and hurried out.

"What is monsieur going to do with two hats?" inquired the saucy messenger.

In a few seconds, Paul was sitting in the carriage, which flew toward Norrbro, and then toward Drott-

ning street, in a way that made the sparks fly from the paving stones.

"Wait here," said Paul to the coachman, when they stopped at the house.

The clock had just struck nine. That was an unusual hour at the house of Marchioness Egmont, who never received any calls before twelve o'clock at the earliest. Nevertheless, she had already made her toilet, which, with the coiffure of that period, must have occupied at least an hour. She wore an easy but careful morning costume. Though she looked unusually serious, she had never been more charming.

When Paul entered, she was sitting at her chocolate, and seemed to have waited for him with impatience.

"Pardon my importunity," said she. "It is not for my sake I have troubled you to come hither, but for your own. Have the goodness to be seated. I must ask you a saucy question. Have you any enemy here in Stockholm?"

"Perhaps," replied Paul.

"Then it is as I surmised. It can be no other than your brother."

"Alas, madame, I must confess to you that I am on nettles. I have just received an anonymous communication to hurry immediately to Solna forest, as my brother's life is in danger?"

"What do you say? Anonymous? Let me see. It cannot be anything but a mesh of that infamous net of intrigues with which you seem beginning to be ensnared. I will tell you why I requested you to call. As you remember, his majesty was very gracious yesterday. After you had gone, he was pleased to ask me several questions about you, and I—I depicted you not at all as a wild beast, as you can understand. 'What can I do for that young man?' asked his majesty at last. 'Sire,' said I, 'place him where he will have an opportunity to show for what he is fit. Give him some

little position in proximity to your majesty's person.' '*Mais si*,' said the king, with his sly smile, 'do you think he would be flattered by the position of gentleman of the bed-chamber?' 'That, I venture to doubt,' I replied, 'but a little office of private secretary I believe would please him better, though it only might be to write addresses on your majesty's correspondence.' 'He shall have it,' said the king, 'and on your responsibility, madame, for the only vacant place I have is for just my secret correspondence. Is he faithful and discreet?' 'As the grave,' I replied. 'That is well,' said the king."

"But, madame . . . ."

"No buts. You ought to know, my dear Bertelsköld, that from such a place the way is always open to any other whatever. In a few months, nothing will prevent your asking a commission as an officer in the guards, if that will suit you better. I thought of that immediately, but it seemed to me better for you to have time for reflection."

"How am I to thank you for so much kindness?"

"By listening to what I tell you, and not looking as though your thoughts were in the moon. In short, you were quite sure of the place, when, at a ball last night at the queen dowager's, I heard that some one had been slandering you to his majesty. The king had been told that you had been expelled from a university in Livonia or Finland, I do not remember where, for some infamous audacity; in a word, that you were an extremely indiscreet and unreliable person. Unfortunately, his majesty was no longer at the ball, and at noon to-day he is going out to Ekolssund. So you must hurry to the palace, and request private audience; I have arranged so that you will have it. You will frankly state the reason of your suspension, which *cannot* have had any ignoble cause. His majesty is prepared, he will hear you kindly, and give you

that confidential position which will attach you daily to his person, and your fortune is made."

"But I cannot go to the palace at this moment. You forget my brother . . . ."

"Ah, your brother! And *by what* has he made himself worthy of being remembered?"

CHAPTER XXVII.

INTRIGUES AND SPIDER-WEBS.

"IF you were in my place," said Paul, "I am sure your good heart would immediately tell you what you ought to do. My father is suffering from our unhappy disagreement, and commands me to seek reconciliation. My mother,—yes, why should I conceal my suspicion from you? That anonymous summons perhaps comes from my mother."

"And you believe that your mother would beg you to save your mortal enemy!"

"In that very particular, I recognize her, madame. A letter from my mother has arrived at Falkby. Either she is here, or she has a confidant here."

"No, my dear count," responded the marchioness, after some reflection, "you are too inexperienced in the card-tricks of intrigue. The person who wrote the summons probably knows very well that at noon his majesty is going to leave town, that you will not have the opportunity afterward to justify yourself, and that the enviable position you ought to fill will meantime be given away to another. To get to Solna and back, where good care will be taken to detain you, you will require at least two hours. When you get back, the king will be invisible, and your fortune lost. You

there see the reason why that insidious note was sent you."

"Will you allow me to use your carriage and horses?"

"With pleasure. But I assure you I shall be seriously angry with you, if you are stubborn enough to slight my good counsel. Do not go to Solna, go directly to the palace, and after you have unmasked the base slander that has been laid like a mine of powder beneath your fortune, you can of course go where you please."

And the marchioness took his hand, with a look so pleading, so irresistible, that it might have made an apostate of a cardinal.

"No, madame," said Paul. "Add to your kindness by pardoning my disobedience. I will try to make amends for it with my whole life."

"Bertelsköld, I conjure you, *for my sake*, if not for your own,—do not go to Solna! Go to the palace!"

"Have you any other command?"

"What? You will go?"

"If I tarry longer, I shall be unfaithful to my duty. You, madame, who so well know how to appreciate a woman's heart—learn also to appreciate a man's!"

Paul rushed out.

Pale with anger, Marchioness Ėgmont arose, and rung violently for her waiting-maid. "Babette," said she, "when the count returns, he will not be received."

"But if he ascends the little staircase!" asked the girl, pursing her mouth.

"No, no, no, I say. He will not be received under any pretext. He is an ungrateful . . . ."

"But if he repents?—If he shoots himself?—He is capable of anything,—and he is handsome when he is angry," rejoined Babette, who was by no means indifferent to a handsome young man and a pretty gold coin.

"Go! I want to be alone!"

Babette went. "The wind blows from that point now," muttered she to herself. "Well, a little squabble sometimes may give variety. But may I become a peasant-girl if I do not receive counter orders within an hour. . . . So soon? Indeed."

The bell sounded.

"Babette, did the count take my carriage?"

"Yes, your grace, he was really impudent enough."

"It was I who *offered* it to him. He will be sure to come back, but you can tell him I have just ridden out."

"And if he comes this evening?"

"Then I am not at home."

"But if he comes to-morrow?"

"You are intolerable. To-morrow we shall see."

Babette departed, but she had not closed the door before the bell rung for the third time.

"I shall be at home this evening, but you can tell him that I am very angry."

"Shall I turn him away if he comes in the forenoon?"

"What a thorn you are! Well, he may come,—but by the main staircase, do you understand?"

"Yes, your grace."

"Wait, I will not receive any one else to-day. I have a headache."

"I think your grace never looked so blooming."

"Am I to be obeyed?"

"Your grace's command shall be followed, to a dot."

"Go away."

Babette disappeared "Well, I knew how it would be from the very first," muttered the over-indulged servant, with a toss of her snub nose. "It was sure to be sunshine after a thunder-storm."

Meanwhile we must for awhile leave Marchioness Egmont alone with her lovely caprices, to enter into another aristocratic room on Drottning Street, where

Count Bernhard Bertelsköld, the same morning, sat occupied with some letters, which seemed to possess particular interest for him.

"*Affair number one*," said he to himself, as he sorted the letters. "The more I think of it, the more natural, indeed the more necessary, I find it for my father to marry Lady Sjöblad. It is the only means forever to cut off madame's speculations. She regards herself as indispensable,—she is trying to make us beg her on our knees to come back. Of course she expects then to be recalled with an *éclat* which will give her perfect revenge. But she will be mistaken. We shall look out that the rupture becomes irreparable, and that can best be brought about by an advertisement in the newspapers It is not exactly agreeable to have the newspapers illustrated with our name, but what will a man not do for his father's happiness! My filial sacrifice will be admired. It would be difficult, perhaps impossible, to prevail on *mon cher* papa to take so decisive a step. I know him,—nothing is needed but for Vera to whine, or Paul to declaim, and he will pay out the cable. It is therefore best that I take the decisive step. He will lament, that is plain, but he will submit to what can no longer be changed. Consequently an announcement of the following purport should be made:

'Whereas my wife, Esther, *née* Larsson,' (it ought to read 'my wife') 'in an unknown manner has deserted my dwelling, and it cannot be found out what place she at present frequents' ('frequents'—that is rich!) 'therefore be it made known by these presents, to her, Esther Larsson, that she is legally summoned within a year and a night to appear and live again with me; and if it should fall out otherwise,' (it would 'fall out otherwise' if she should appear on requisition,) 'if it fall out otherwise, I shall enter into another marriage. Falkby, April 6th, 1772. Charles Victor Bertel.' . . . . the pen will not give ink! . . . . 'Ber-

telkold; count, major-general, and knight of the Royal Order of the Sword, together with the Royal Danish Order of Dannebrog, and the first class of the Imperial Russian Order of St. Anne.'

"So there, the matter is in order. *Avis au lecteur.* Like every good comedy, the end of the one act contains the scheme of the next. José!"

"*Señor*!"

"This paper you will take to the Gazette printing-house to-day, with the order that it be inserted in to-morrow's issue."

"It shall be done, *Señor.*"

"*Affair number two*," resumed Count Bernhard. "For fear that my lord brother should succeed in insinuating himself with his majesty, in spite of all that I have already caused to transpire about his noble person, it will be necessary, through Count Scheffer, to have his majesty betimes get a copy of to morrow's announcement. Our gracious king, with all his coquetry for the untitled estates, has a very delicate nose for aristocratic blue-blood, and a still greater horror for public scandal. *Merci, mon genie!* That announcement is like the knight on a chess-board,—it kicks away, but it kicks toward every point, and jumps, if need be, over the king himself .... José!"

"*Señor!*"

"This note you will take to Councilor Count Scheffer."

"It shall be done, *Señor.*"

"*Affair number three.* It is your turn now, my gracious marchioness! I have a sketch here, which I hope will be a pleasant surprise to you. Let us hear:

'How long shall noble Swedes allow foreign *tartuffes*'—(no, that will not do; the speech must conform to the public, and be as uncivil as a butcher's dog.) 'How long shall noble Swedes let foreign herd-dogs, human wolves, and lewd trash, who fatten by the sweat and blood of honest people, bungle with the

welfare of the country? An ill-famed house on D—— street is very well known, where every night infamy spreads its peacock-tail in the sunshine of royal favor, and vice revels in the bloody tears of weeping virtue.' (Fine! That will make the rabble sob.) 'A certain aristocratic queen of spades is also known, who calls herself Mar——ss E——t, and who tells to whoever will hear it that all Swedes are more stupid than beef-cattle, whereupon she alleges, as indisputable proof, that she has now for more than a half-year, so to speak, kicked them, like beasts, down stairs every day. It is also known that the aforesaid queen of spades, who has a good eye for the king of diamonds, had been, before she came here, princess in a house of correction, and was prevailed upon to honor Sweden with her presence, on the condition that she should receive here a pension of thirty thousand' (that is too little,)'fifty thousand rix-dollars, in order to teach us, stupid cart-horses, to make cabriolets after the latest fashion. She has at present twenty four' (let that be twenty-one) 'declared gallants, who on her account manipulate the house of lords, to make utter fools of the untitled estates, after which the aforesaid queen of spades is to be elevated to the ace of trumps, and govern the kingdom like a famished fox. How long shall noble Swedes, etc., etc.'—We must add a fine exhortation at the close, that the people themselves ought to take revenge for virtue and justice, which are so basely trampled under foot. José!"

"*Señor!*"

"This paper you will carry to the editor of the 'Government Fiscal,' and tell him for me that he is to insert it, as usual, strictly anonymous, and as soon as possible. Tell him that the pay stipulated will be doubled for this time."

"It shall be done, *Senor!*"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AFFAIR NUMBER FIVE.

"*AFFAIR number four*," continued Count Bernhard. "The council is formally deposed, thanks to the little rub I knew how at the right moment to give plebeian pride. The self-styled fatherland is saved, and self-styled liberty can be satisfied. In this turbid water more than one fisherman will throw out his net. The most sagacious and daring are going to catch the largest fishes. I know one who is sagacious but not daring, and that is our gracious sovereign, with his theatrical gestures. I know many who are daring but not sagacious, and among them our knightly leader of 'Svenska Botten.' Ah! I had very nearly forgotten; we have a bone to pick at Solna, and it is already nine o'clock. So that is *affair number five*. By eleven o'clock all ought to be concluded, and then there will either be one fool less in the world, or two fools more, who will go and dine after they have taken exercise. The whole foolery is only a parenthetical portion of number four. As to that affair, I know one who is sagacious and bold at once, so victory ought not to be doubtful. The seat in the council, *ça n'est plus mon grade*. But in order not to leave any means unused, there still remains *affair number six*."

Count Bernhard hunted up some rather old and yellowed notes, and compared them with a newly arrived letter. An almost gloomy expression alternated at intervals with the usual sarcastic smile which now almost continually dwelt upon his lips.

"I truly do not know," he continued, "whether my father's uncle, Count Torsten Bertelsköld, was so re-

fined a statesman as he himself seems to pretend in these his secret memoirs, but what I with certainty fancy I find is that he was a dupe to his superstition and his lively imagination. With what ridiculous credulity he speaks about that ring, which he regarded as an unfailing talisman for all earthly power, honor, and fortune! And has he not taken the trouble to write out a legend about all its miracles, which might do credit to a Capuchin monk's power of invention! The notes close with a dim intimation of hopes so presumptuous that my little ministerial plans, in comparison with them, are a school-boy's card house. But here is a note in the margin by another hand. 'Lost by a false oath to the widow Flinta.' Flinta? Probably the same flint that made my step-mother strike fire. It was well that I remembered that old witch . . . .

"I cannot deny, however," resumed the count, after some reflection, "that my dear grand-uncle's legend has awakened in me a certain curiosity. It would, *par curiosité*, be really *amusant* to own such a little piece of monopoly in that commodity which is most current in the market. What a ridiculous idea of me to have the recent fate of that old bit of copper searched into! Our friend Ljung seems to have been the last-known possessor. This is what he writes to me: The ring was stolen from him twenty years ago. At my request, but in vain, he has had it advertised in the churches as a family jewel, and advises me not to attach any importance to that old superstition, which only makes men mad. The counsel is doubtless quite sensible, but—is there no declared favorite of fortune here from whom I might demand back my rightful inheritance? . . . . A quarter of ten! It is time to dispatch our *affair number five.*"

Count Bernhard took out a pair of pistols, richly inlaid with gold and ornamented with the royal Spanish arms, examined them carefully, changed flints in the locks, put them into the pocket of his long fur-

bordered overcoat, and, stepping into his waiting carriage, ordered the coachman to drive to Solna.

Northwest from Stockholm, in that quiet rural region where Choræus now rests near the wall of the old church, and whither an echo of the city's noise seldom intrudes, the spring sunshine had already melted away the snow, and the first skylarks were chirping far up in the blue ether. West of the church lay a little pine forest, and near it a peasant farm, where sometimes this or that honest Stockholmite used in summer-time to go, with children and flowers, in quest of a bowl of sour milk or a basket of refreshing strawberries. But now, in bad going, the region was so lonely that a more suitable place could scarcely have been chosen for such affairs as this, "number five," which belonged to the every-day amusements of the nobility, but to which the honorable Count Bertelsköld, however, seemed to attach so little importance.

The two antagonists were punctual, and arrived almost at the stroke of ten, Baron Sprengtport being accompanied by his second, Captain Wagenfelt. Neither the song of the larks, nor the glad sunshine, nor the spring-like feeling in all nature, seemed to make the least impression on the gentlemen. They greeted each other politely but coldly, and the place was fixed upon near the extremity of the pine forest, a hundred paces from the peasant farm, whose inhabitants, not unaccustomed to such guests, scarcely seemed to honor them with transient attention.

A fourth person, however, was still lacking. Bertelsköld's second, Auditor Hägerflycht, who had promised to ride out at the appointed time, kept them waiting.

The gentlemen became impatient. "Your second, sir count, seems to have forgotten himself at breakfast," said Sprengtport.

"He is probably correcting the minutes after the expulsion of the council," replied Bertelsköld, with an

irritating allusion to the occasion of their quarrel. "That will not prevent our deciding the affair, in case Captain Wagenfelt will have the goodness to serve us both."

"No, sir count, that is a courtesy on your part which I cannot accept," reponded the antagonist. "Will you permit me to offer a glass of Madeira while we are waiting?" and he drew from his pocket a flask, whose screwed-on tin stopper served as a beaker.

"With the greatest pleasure," replied Bertelsköld, for the spring wind was blowing cold from the town, and the clock in the tower of St. Jacob's Church was heard to strike half-past ten.

"It is said, sir count, that you have the best pistols in Sweden," resumed Sprengtport. "Shall we while away the time with a little shooting at a mark?"

"If that is your pleasure, baron. I had the happiness, on a hunt in Aranjuez, to lay low a wild boar which had seized the Infant of Spain, and his highness was pleased to give me the pistols as a souvenir of my trifling service. They really do not hit badly. See there!"

A sparrow flew up from the fence near by. The shot cracked, and the winged inhabitant of Solna forest fell with crushed head to the ground.

"Bravo! Well hit, my dear count," exclaimed Sprengtport. "The Infant of Spain could not do that better. I really do not know whether I should venture to compete with you, but perhaps I can beg Captain Wagenfelt to be good enough to hold this *louis d'or* between his thumb and second finger. Oh! be calm! I will be responsible for the fingers!"

The captain hesitated a moment, but, seeing Bertelsköld's sarcastic face, he took the gold coin with averse hand, and placed himself eight paces distant.

"No, fifteen, if I may beg," said the baron, with a nod and a smile. "You remember that is the distance agreed upon to-day."

And almost without taking aim, he raised the pistol. Instantly the light blue smoke flew out of its muzzle, and the gold coin, flattened by the ball, lay a few paces away. A more skillful marksman than Sprengtport was hardly to be found at that time.

"I return your compliment, sir baron," said Bertelsköld, calmly. "That shot ought to be rewarded with a field-marshal's staff. Nevertheless, baron, you will, I hope, not insist that the inexplicable delay of my second shall detain us any longer. My time is occupied."

"Mine too, but I cannot kill you without legal witnesses, sir count!"

"But I shall not have the least trouble in killing you, sir baron!"

"There comes Hägerflygt at last!" exclaimed Captain Wagenfelt, pointing to a carriage, which, with weary horses, was slowly approaching on the bad road.

"That is not he," said Bertelsköld; "that is a stranger."

The stranger came nearer, and out of the carriage, with hurrying pace, sprung a young man, clad in black. It was Paul Bertelsköld.

"Ah, this is most opportune for us. It is your brother, sir count, who offers to become your second."

"By whose permission are you here, sir?" exclaimed Count Bernhard, pale with anger. "Leave this place instantly!"

Paul pretended not to hear those words, or did not take the trouble to answer. Turning with a slight salutation to Baron Sprengtport, he said:

"Allow me, sir baron, to be the first to exchange a shot with you?"

"What, pray?"

"I beg the honor of exchanging balls with you.

"Are you crazy, sir? What the devil have we against each other?"

"Nothing. But I renew my request."

"See here, my young friend, it is almost eleven o'clock. We have not time to gossip away the whole day in children's babble. Have the goodness to measure out the ground with Captain Wagenfelt, and then take your position as second!"

"Sir baron!" responded Paul, "I am not a child, to be frightened with bugbears, and I declare that if you intend to fight with Count Bernhard Bertelsköld, you must first fight with me. If you refuse, I pronounce you, in the presence of these gentlemen, a rascal and a wretch."

"Hoity-toity, sir! Only hear the darling!" said Sprengtport, half vexed and half laughing. "Why, you talk like an old fellow. Then have you such an extraordinary desire to be killed, my young sir?"

"That is indifferent to me. I want to fight with you."

"What say you, sir count, about this proposition? You have indisputably an older right to my ball, so it belongs to you to consent or refuse."

"I reply that the boy is crack-brained, and that any one who, unbidden, mingles himself in an affair of honor, deserves to be chased away by our lackeys. However, and as my second still tarries, I give you perfect liberty, sir baron, to dispatch him as you think best."

"I thank you," said Paul, with a graceful bow. "Perhaps I may ask you, Count Bertelsköld, to be my second. I will afterward do you the same service, if it lies in my power."

"Why, my dear sirs!" exclaimed the baron, with visible surprise, "have I heard wrongly, or are the gentlemen not brothers?"

CHAPTER XXIX.

CONCLUSION OF AFFAIR NUMBER FIVE.

"HAVE I heard wrongly? Are not the gentlemen brothers?" These questions touched Paul Bertelsköld; he took four steps forward, approached Count Bernhard, and offered him his hand, without by a word betraying those feelings which were struggling within him.

"Your brother offers you his hand, sir count!" said Sprengtport.

"Well, what do you want done with those stupid boys of the house of lords?" said Count Bernhard to Wagenfelt, without noticing the reconciliation and self-denial Paul had offered him. "Send them home to their fathers, and recommend a flogging for them!"

Paul withdrew his hand, and said to Sprengtport: "Sir colonel, you will have the first shot."

"Well, if you are utterly tired of life, then *à la bonheur*. But I will not accept any advantage, and propose that we shoot at the same time. You can depend on my pistols. The one never misses fire when the other goes off. *Those two* are brothers!"

The seconds measured off the ground. That friendly service, Count Bernhard could not deny his brother. They shared wind and sun alike, and it had been agreed that the two combatants, from a distance of twenty paces, should advance toward each other, and at a distance of fifteen paces, both should shoot at the same time.

It was done, the signal was given, and the never-failing weapons went off so simultaneously that the report resembled that of a single shot.

Paul had been standing near a pine tree. When the smoke was dissipated, he was seen staggeringly grasping after the trunk of the tree.

"A flesh-wound! An extra cutlet in the left shoulder-blade. It is of no consequence—will be well in two weeks!" exclaimed Baron Sprengtport, with a cheerful countenance, as he hurried forward, for he was accustomed to calculating to a dot where the ball should strike.

"It is nothing!" said Paul, but at the same time his cheeks whitened, and he sunk to the ground, while his powerless hand glided down the tree-trunk.

Two of the gentlemen hastened to him, but the third stood motionless. It was found that the ball had hit *almost* at the spot appointed it; only a half-inch too low, and that half-inch made the "cutlet" in the shoulder-blade very dubious.

"The devil!" said Sprengtport, "I must have had a little sun in my eyes. Will you be good enough, sir captain, to get the young fellow cared for at the peasant-yard, till I have time to procure a physician? I, myself, need a tailor, for the present, both for my coat and my carcass. But here is a bandage which I always carry with me," and he showed his bleeding right arm, on which Paul's bullet had ripped open the sleeve so skillfully, from the elbow to the shoulder, that no shears could have done it better.

"What a misfortune? You are wounded, you are bleeding, my dear baron!" now exclaimed Count Bernhard, and that was the first token of sympathy heard from his lips.

"Yes," was the reply; "for this time, you must pardon me, sir count, that I cannot serve you with a bullet in the forehead, for which I fancy I feel more and more inclination, the further I have had the honor of profiting by your acquaintance. As you see, I am rendered unable to manage my weapon. So it is your brother to whom you are indebted for your life, perhaps by the

sacrifice of his own. The gentlemen were brothers notwithstanding, I see."

"I beg you remember that our settlement is deferred, but not decided!" rejoined Count Bernhard, dark of mood.

"I hope so, if there is any divine justice in reserve," replied Sprengtport. "That young man, your brother, whom I saw for the first time the day before yesterday, and with whom I have never passed a hasty word,—why do you suppose he sought us here, and buzzed like a wasp about my ears? That is not exactly common, sir count, for the rumor of my former *rencontres* have a wonderful effect in keeping winged animals at a distance. But I will exchange my sword for an unpeeled red beet, and my noble name for a gypsy's sacerdotal certificate, if the young noddy did not come and demand the preference solely for your sake. And yet,—when he offered you his hand, you had no opportunity to bestow on him any attention. Fie, sir count! That was ignoble of you! Tell me the worst of which one brother can be guilty toward another,—say that he has stolen my sweetheart, that he has robbed my inheritence, that he has reviled my honor, if possible, that he has killed our common father or our common mother,—for nature cannot so infamously abnegate herself that you two can have both father and mother in common,—and yet if he came to me at such a time, when no one knows who is to be alive an hour later,—and if he came to buy my life by offering his own,—and reached me his hand at such a moment,—no, sir count, if at that time I took it on my conscience to repulse his hand, I should never again be able to look an honest man in the eyes, and should regard myself stricken like a disgrace from the human race, whose most sacred mandate I had, like a cannibal, trampled under foot! There you have my parting words, you so-called count, who have not so much noble blood in your veins as my meanest baggage boy, and who, by your Spanish em-

bassy, learned nothing but vanity, cabinet intrigues, the dagger, the vendetta, and perhaps, as the crown of these inestimable qualifications, the art of draping your mantle so that you look like a brigand-chief. See to the young man, Wagenfelt! I will make haste and immediately send my carriage and a physician."

With these words, Baron Sprengtport disdainfully turned his back on his antagonist, and, humming a favorite melody from the opera of Zenaide, rode back to town, while Bernhard Bertelsköld, apparently perfectly indifferent, followed him in his carriage a few steps behind. Paul was meantime taken to the peasant cottage, where Captain Wagenfelt examined the wound, and found that the ball must have passed through a lobe of the right lung, or at least very near it. The bleeding was profuse, and almost impossible to check.

In the cottage, there were only an elderly couple with their grand-children, and a middle-aged woman, who at the entrance of the strangers was sitting and reading to the peasant folks.

"There is something that Mora from Östanlid ought to mend, so it will stick together, or he will bleed to death by noon," said the old man, shaking his head.

At these words, the reading woman slowly raised her eyes from the book, and closing it very carefully, approached the wounded and as yet unconscious youth.

"Will you let me take care of that?" inquired the woman, and, without waiting for reply, she thrust the others aside.

"Mora repairs critters and other folk," put in the old man, with all the dignity of a collegium medicum making out a certificate for a prince's own huntsman or a hard-soap manufacturer. "The gentleman can just as well go back to town and attend to his business. Mora will be quite responsible for the young man's life."

CHAPTER XXX.

ANOTHER DISAPPEARANCE.

FOR Marchioness Egmont, the hours passed by with the slowness of snails. Time and again she rung for Babette, to ask if any visitor had been announced at the great stairway, if the carriage had been sent back, if any messenger was waiting down in the hall, and a thousand other things with which impatience and melancholy are wont to bother themselves and others. We must do Babette the justice to say that she knew how, with a certain adroitness, to vary the monotonous replies. Once it was "No, madame!" another time, "Oh, preserve us!" the third time, "Who should it have been?" and a toss of the head completed the meaning.

"Babette!" said the marchioness, at last, "I think I hear a carriage."

Babette went, and returned with the reply that the young count had sent the carriage back from Solna.

"Go ask the coachman what persons he met at Solna."

"I have taken the liberty to ask about that on my own account," said Babette mischievously, "and Andersson thought he recognized Colonel Sprengtport, but the other two gentlemen he did not know. They seem to have been amusing themselves by shooting at a mark."

"Tell Andersson to bring the carriage again; I want to ride out immediately," said the marchioness, blanching. She now understood everything, and trembled as she remembered Baron Sprengtport's well-known art of killing.

"The horses are tired, madame!"

"Then have the Arabian saddled."

The command was obeyed; but the half-hour that elapsed before Marchioness Egmont was on horseback, and, accompanied by her groom, was bounding along Drottning Street, up King's Hill, and on past Körstrand, out toward Carlberg and Solna, that half-hour seemed to her longer than the month she had spent on the journey hither from Paris.

Near Carlberg, she met a horseman, Captain Wagenfelt, who was returning to town to breakfast. His embarrassed mien did not escape the keen eyes of the young horsewoman, and instead of passing with a slight salutation, she quickly reined her horse across the road, and cut off every means of the captain's escaping her.

"Pardon me, sir captain," said she; "is everything already past, as you are returning alone?"

"Count Bertelsköld and Baron Sprengtport returned to town about an hour ago."

"Unharmed? Answer me without hesitation. I know all, and even if I did not, you would not succeed in misleading me, captain."

"That being the case," replied Wagenfelt, with a polite bow, "I can calm your grace with the assurance that everything was a bagatelle. Baron Sprengtport only got his right arm slightly grazed. It is a mere scratch, and will be healed by day after to-morrow."

"And Count Bertelsköld?"

"Not a hair of his head is harmed, provided he has not broken down on the road home, for, in this condition of the roads, anything is possible."

The marchioness transfixed the victim of her curiosity.

"Baron Sprengtport has not been lucky to-day. He has been wounded, and his antagonist is unharmed. Admit, sir captain, that that is—how shall I express myself?—rather improbable."

"Your grace will have the opportunity to obtain the most reliable intelligence from Count Bertelsköld

himself, for, if I mistake not, that is his carriage and himself which are to be seen there in the distance returning from town," said the captain, making a skillful but unsuccessful attempt to escape.

"An hour ago, you say, Count Bertelsköld went from Solna to town, and now he is returning from town to Solna. Explain to me such an uncommon taste for country life, sir captain!"

"He probably has some reason which he knows better than I."

"Where is his brother, young Paul Bertelsköld?"

"Your grace has a wonderfully handsome horse. What did it cost?"

"I ask you, captain, once more, where is Paul Bertelsköld?"

"And I once more most humbly reply that I have never seen such a slender-built Algerian."

The marchioness drew forth, from the holster of the saddle, a most highly ornamented little pistol, inlaid with mother-of-pearl, cocked it, and pointed the muzzle toward the Arabian's restless ears.

"My horse seems to have won your approbation, sir captain," said she, playing with the weapon. "Well, I have a proposal to make you. Either you will tell me immediately, and without circumlocution, where that young man is, *whom the gentlemen have killed*, or my Saladin shall, the next moment, lie dead at your feet. So it depends upon you whether I am left on foot, on the highway. . . ."

Wagenfelt hesitated. He very well knew that the resolute little French woman could keep her word when she once got anything into her head.

"If your grace will ride toward Solna Church, west of the church will be seen a little pine forest, and near it a red-painted peasant-cottage. Paul Bertelsköld is there but I conjure your grace. . . ."

"Is he dead?"

"Not yet."

"That is good. I thank you for my Saladin's life, and wish you a pleasant ride, sir captain."

With these words, Marchioness Egmont left the passage free, and let her Arabian bound off as fleetly as though he felt the burning sand of the desert beneath his hoofs. Before long she had disappeared in the direction of Solna.

"The devil!" exclaimed the captain, with the national Swedish expression for the highest degree of astonishment: "What a woman! How proud, how captivating, even in her caprices! Upon my honor, I would be almost tempted to exchange with that young noddy over there, and take his ball in my body. She is in love with him,—I'll wager that! She is stark mad with love. And yet,—what a woman! What a charmer! In all Sweden, she has not an equal!"

A few minutes later, the marchioness, after having left her panting groom far behind, was at the peasant cottage. She entered. The old couple were alone and seemed surprised by this new visit.

"Where is the wounded young man?" asked the marchioness, pale as a withered rose, notwithstanding the ride ought to have suffused her cheeks with the crimson of the peony.

The old man shook his head, and pretended not to understand her broken Swedish.

"See here!" continued the marchioness, tossing him a purse which resounded against the old pine table. "Take me to him immediately; I am—his sister."

"The young gentleman, believe me, is gone away. It was his relations who went off with him," replied the old man hesitatingly, and probably touched by the jingling eloquence of the purse.

"What does that mean? What relations?"

"You see we did not find out very much about it. As soon as the captain went to town, to eat in town, for you see grand gentlemen are all as hungry as wolves,

in the morning, a rickety carriage came here, and went off with him, they said, to the doctor."

"Whither?"

"On the highway."

"In what direction on the highway?"

"Well, you see, nobody found that out."

A sudden suspicion flashed through the head of the marchioness. Would Count Bernhard?—But here he was coming himself; he was just entering the door. He had, on the way back to town, had time to reflect how it must injure his reputation, if it became known that he had left his brother in that situation, and therefore hastening to be beforehand with Sprengtport, he had now, with brotherly affection, which the world would be compelled to admire, himself brought a physician out to Solna.

"Your friendship comes too late; Paul has disappeared!" exclaimed the marchioness.

"Disappeared! Impossible!" responded Count Bernhard, doubly surprised, and not agreeably.

"You surpass yourself. It is you who have had him carried away in order to be sure of his death!" said the marchioness, cuttingly.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE NEWSPAPERS AND THEIR READERS.

IN the burgher club of the Caps, a few worthy representatives were sitting with their pipes and ale-mugs, deeply engaged in important deliberations. They had just disposed of the vacated places of the councilors, and agreed upon the affairs of Poland, when the waiter-boy entered with the day's papers, and received for them his ordinary fee of two-pence from

each customer. The "papers" were at that time still in the first hopeful budding of childhood, but the real animus of the modern journal was already in them, as well as curiosity in their readers. For awhile, the gentlemen sat in solemn silence, each with his nose pointed to his paper.

"Brother Larsson!" finally exclaimed one of the representatives.

"What, please?"

"Here is something concerning yourself in the first place, and the house in the second. 'Whereas my wife Esther, *née* Larsson, in an unknown manner has deserted my dwelling, and it cannot be found out what place she at presents frequents '——"

"Let me take it," said Thomas, who, like almost all East Bothnians, was fond of his family and jealous of its honor. As he read the slanderous announcement, where every letter was calculated to murder a woman-heart, his stern sunburnt forehead was seen to furrow, and his lips firmly close.

"Is she not your blood-aunt?" inquired the representative.

Larsson nodded.

"Well, it was plain that it would turn out so, when she allowed herself to be taken into the hawk's nest. Truly, we are living in the last days of the world. Have you heard, brother, what they say about the Bertelskölds?"

"No."

"They say that in that family there never has been two brothers who have not been the bitterest enemies to each other, and it is no longer ago than yesterday that two of them shot and buried each other near Carlberg."

"Indeed!"

"Representative Falberg is a Dalecarlian," smilingly replied Burgomaster Hæggström, who thought the story so good that he offered the narrator a pinch of Spanish snuff.

"Thank you," said the representative, and continued, "it is said to have taken place because they got into a quarrel about a marchioness . . . ."

"*Apropos*, gentlemen, here is a very exquisite bit in the State Fiscal," interposed a spindle-shanked apothecary from Norrtelje, known as the poet of the diet "That is what I call writing soundly and honestly, without any deceitful verbiage. Do but hear how delicately and edifyingly such an arrant rascal of a fellow writes! 'How long shall noble Swedes let foreign dogs, human wolves, and lewd trash, who fatten by the sweat and blood of honest people, bungle with the welfare of the country!' You see, my good sirs, that pinches. That is somewhat more cutting than Cicero,—what do you think?"

"Read on!" said a grocer, who dealt in plebeian commodities.

"'A certain queen of spades is also known, who has a good eye to the king of diamonds,'—be good enough to observe 'queen' and 'king'! That is excellent! Gentlemen, I am as loyal a subject as any one, but I maintain that the State Fiscal is the best newspaper in Sweden, and that its editor, Majister Bollfras, is a true patriot, who for his deeds deserves well of his country."

"Of course," responded the burgomaster, with a new pinch of snuff. "He is at present clawing the eyes out of the nobility, but was it not this same Bollfras who was last autumn clawing all the honor and honesty out of the untitled estates?"

"Yes, yes!" shouted the others in their turn.

"Be good enough to observe 'D— Street.' No one can guess that. And 'Mar——ss E——t.' No one can interpret that either. Admit that he is a polished fellow! And she receives fifty thousand rix-dollars salary for ruining the kingdom!"

"Can it be possible?"

"Possible? It is as sure as that a nation of angels

might at last lose patience. This evening I heard something whispered on Kornhamn Square, and down there among the pitch-jackets at the wharf the state of feeling was not just what it should be. I should not like to be in the place of the queen of spades at ten o'clock to-night . . . ."

"Why! would they really . . . . ?"

And one after another of the younger ones in the company glided silently to the door.

"Well, representative, do you intend to do anything with that infamous advertisement?" asked Burgomaster Hæggström.

"I do not know," replied Larsson. "It was never the wish of the family that my aunt should give herself and her wealth to that haughty count. 'As she has carded, so has she spun.' They now want to get rid of her. Let them, for all me. Thank God, I have a piece of bread for my aunt, too, and as long as I live she shall not need to go hungry."

"But the nobility rabble ought not to be successful in their evil wish. What do you think of a law-suit, representative? It would batter those untractable counts."

"It will not do," said Larsson.

"There are several sides to the question," rejoined the jurist; "but if nothing else is won, chicanery will be set in motion. That story about the counts yesterday comes as though for that very purpose."

"Hm—, I will write to father in Wasa."

"*Apropos* of your father, is it true that the old man has fallen into the hands of a Jew who robs him under the pretext of making gold?"

"Silly gossip!"

"So much the better. And I cannot believe it about your father, who has always been a discreet man, and careful of his own interests. . . . . But what noise can that be on the street?"

The loud din of a turbulent multitude was heard

outside the club-room, which was situated on a cross-street, not far from Drottning Street.

Outside of Marchioness Egmont's house, a growing mass of people had begun gradually to collect, at first with sarcasms of a harmless nature, which soon, however, turned into shouts and threats, as the watchful crowd, according to its wont on such occasions, succeeded by degrees in exciting itself. That usually richly illuminated house was certainly quite dark to-night, and no plausible reason existed which ought to have awakened the ill-will of the populace; but not in vain had the "State Fiscal" appealed to "noble Swedes" to prevent the "queen of spades" from being "elevated to the ace of trumps, and ruling the kingdom with Famished Fox." The discontent fermenting on every side was seeking a victim, no matter whom, and now turned toward a poor, defenceless woman, who had the five unpardonable faults of being young, beautiful, rich, lovely, and a stranger in Stockholm.

"Out with the bride! Out with the bride!" shouted a number of voices, as at a wedding.

"Out with the queen! She is only a small card to the king!" bawled others.

"Away with all small cards!" clamored others, and at the same time a stone flew toward a pane in the upper story.

That was the signal. The first stone was immediately followed by fifty others, and with the jingling of the window-panes mingled the crash of broken mirrors in the magnificent suite of rooms. Here and there a timid policeman stole cautiously around the street corner, afraid even to show himself before the incensed crowd.

Fortunately, the marchioness was not in town. She had gone out in the morning, it was not known where, and her attendants kept themselves hidden in the yard. When there were no more windows toward the street

to break, the crowd tried to storm the street door, but its firm iron-bound oaken planks defied every assault.

"Come, let us call on the count over there. There is light in the windows!" cried some who had wearied of the bootless work.

"She is there! She is there! The queen of spades is with the jack of clubs to-night!" shrieked others, in fierce transport.

By one of those strange veerings which are so common in popular fury, they had now got it into their heads that the marchioness was at Count Bertelsköld's hotel, which was situated not far away. And as various dark rumors about a fratricide committed at Solna the day before had incited their temper against the supposed murderer, nothing more was needed in order quite unexpectedly to lead all this blind rage against Bertelsköld. The mob on the streets of Stockholm did not itself know how correct its instinct at that time was. No one suspected that it was turning toward the secret instigator himself, who, but now, to satisfy his own revenge, had set all those clamorous crowds in motion against an innocent object.

"Away with the small cards! Down with all counts and marquises!" roared the forward-surging mass, and, without further declaration of war, a shower of stones hailed against the brightly illuminated rooms where Count Bernhard Bertelsköld had this very evening gathered a few of his political friends, to give them the pleasure of being witness to the disgrace and downfall of Marchioness Egmont. The effect of that general volley must have been just as speedy as unexpected, for glimpses of confused shadows were seen within, behind the curtains, and in a few minutes the rooms were empty.

But the crowd was not content. It would have a personal victim to deride or annihilate.

"Out with the bride! Out with the bride!" was shrieked again more madly than before.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE SPIDER IN THE NET.

COUNT Bernhard Bertelsköld had been standing at his window and listening to the tumult, with that sarcastic, self-conceited smile which so faithfully reflected his character. "It is only a few of Marchioness Egmont's admirers, bombarding her with sugar-plums," he had replied, when some of his guests asked the cause of the tumult, and as those present had not belonged to the marchioness's admirers, the witticism had created much amusement.

"That is the chorus from Zenaide, offering its homage to the first actress at his royal majesty's *opera comique*," added a gentleman of the bed-chamber, who had made desperate but vain efforts to get an invitation to the marchioness's last *soirée*.

"The *claque* has good fists,—she is being applauded according to her deserts!" exclaimed a worm-eaten president, who belonged to the young Frenchwoman's many rejected adorers.

"Hark! The crowd is coming in this direction! They are bringing her with them in triumph!" remarked another like him.

"Baron Vergennes will be quite as much charmed with madame's triumphs as she is herself!" added Bertelsköld.

No sooner was this said than a stone flew in through the pane of glass close beside him, and crushed a languishing Venus of alabaster near the opposite wall.

"What does that mean?" inquired the guests, blanching.

"A spent bullet, intended for another point," replied Bertelsköld. But at the same moment, another stone flew through a second window, and immediately afterward followed a shower of similar greetings, here and there grazing a wig, or crushing now a pier-glass and now a chandelier.

"Out with the bride! Out with the bride!" was the cry outside.

The guests, terrified, fled into adjoining rooms. The host himself seemed for a moment bewildered with amazement. But with whatever else Bernhard Bertelsköld might be upbraided, he was not a coward. He contented himself with secretly sending a hint to the chief governor to clear the street; but for that he must gain time. He opened the door to the balcony and walked out.

The street lighting consisted of a few wretched oil-lanterns, several of which, moreover, had been broken, but the count was recognized by the glow of light from his own *salon.* A savage roaring, as of a thousand wild beasts let loose, at the sight of him arose from the dark, surging swarm of people in the street.

"Down with the fratricide! Away with the villainous count! Bring out the bride!" shrieked the mad multitude, and again a shower of stones, thick as the torrent from the thunder-cloud, buzzed around the head of the presumptuous one who had ventured to defy the free people.

Calm and with folded arms, Bertelsköld stood and patiently waited until the hideous uproar had somewhat subsided. He then raiaed his powerful voice and said:

"I thank every honest Swede here present, that when country is to be avenged, he spares neither high nor low."

"Where is your brother, you dog?" shrieked some.

"Hark! Let us hear what he is lying to us!" exclaimed others.

"I thank every noble Swede," continued Bertelsköld, "that he has avenged down-trodden virtue and insulted country, on a foreign deceiver, who has come hither to seize upon the fruit of our sweat and toil, and to steal the bread from the poor laborer's mouth. It is honestly and honorably done of you, boys! I, myself, have given up all intercourse with that base woman whom you seek to-night, and I shall give myself no rest until she has been chased with whips from our old Sweden, which is too good and too free to become the prey of foreign thieves!"

"Bravo! Bravo! Just hear, he is talking like a man!" murmured the easily blinded crowd, while a few voices further away still continued to mutter: "He is hiding her at his house! Where has he put his brother?"

"Send some from among you to search through my whole house, and if I am hiding the traitress here, then leave not one stone upon another!" continued the speaker. "Who asks after my brother? Have not my brother and I challenged an aristocratic gentleman, whom I will not name, but who lives over there by the tennis court, because he insulted the rights of the people, and declared that all the untitled estates ought to be whipped away from the diet? Have I not voted for the unseating of the council? Have I not defended the king against his enemies, who wish to rule the realm of Sweden according to French and Russian commands? Long live the king! Long live the people! Long live liberty! Long live old Sweden! Hurrah!"

"Hurrah! Hurrah!" shouted the converted multitude, who were fully persuaded that a man who had talked so finely about "down-trodden virtue" and the "insulted country," a man who had fought so valiantly for the people and liberty, could not possibly be the

murderer or traitor they had just imagined. And in that general resounding hurrah soon mingled a multitude of hoarse drunken voices shrieking with all their might, "Long live Bertelsköld!"

"I thank you," continued the count, with almost a royal bow, which was all the more becoming to him from the fact that no one, in that dim light, could see the smile of scorn on his lips. "In the name of our rescued country I thank you, and, for your behavior, beg you to make for yourselves a happy evening."

At these words he let three purses, full of silver coin, probably to the value of three or four hundred rix-dollars, drop into the crowd, whose jubilation now exceeded all bounds. There was no end to the cheering; a multitude of ragged hats flew in the air, and, if the speaker had been standing below, he would surely have been borne in triumph through the streets.

"To the ale-house! To the ale-house!" a surging shout was now heard, mingled with other voices which proposed that Sprengtport, the traitor near the tennis-court, who had wished to drive the untitled estates away from the diet with whips, ought first to be chastised. A quarrel arose, and the raging billows of the riot began to turn against each other.

Bertelsköld still continued standing on the balcony, sneering in his heart at that unthinking rabble whose blind wrath he had so well known how to turn to his own ends. "It is progressing finely," said he to himself. "To-morrow my name will signify in Stockholm a defender of liberty, and on the shoulders of this same stupid mob I will climb so high that majesty itself shall tremble. At last! There come my lately summoned actors in the comedy! The mob is now to pay the fiddlers for my broken windows. But I wash my hands. Is it my fault that the dragoons murder liberty? Have not I defended her?"

That message which Bertelsköld had secretly sent to the chief governor had not failed in its effect. This

gentleman belonged to the Cap party, which, during the great discontent in the metropolis, every moment feared seeing the diet blown up by a revolution, so nothing but a hint was needed for him to stifle the threatening insurrection in its very infancy. He had, therefore, in the greatest haste given orders to a squadron of body-guard dragoons to mount their horses and at any price whatever clear the streets.

Thus it was that, while the clamorous crowd still continued to dispute whether they ought to betake themselves to the ale-houses or the tennis-court, the squadron from Norrmalm's Square sprung to the left and then to the right into Drottning Street, driving aside all who came in its way. An outcry of anger and consternation went ahead of the horsemen, and quickly communicated itself to the masses outside the hotel, who unexpectedly saw themselves attacked by a fearfully superior force. The most furious assumed an attitude of defense, and tore up stones from the street pavement, but before they had time to prepare for a regular protective struggle the dragoons were upon them and blindly slashing into the dense crowds, first with the flat of their sabers, and soon enough also with the edge. Vain was all defense. To the right and the left fell the people under the horses' hoofs, curses were mingled with cries of agony, and within a few minutes the squadron had ridden past, all the way driving before them fleeing and scattered crowds, which were finally lost in the more remote side streets.

Bertelsköld had drawn somewhat back, but, with a secret malicious delight, such as he had not in a long time experienced, was still standing in the balcony door. He had been successful in everything: he had had a full measure of enjoyment from the revenge he had taken on all his enemies, from the danger he had so skillfully diverted from his own head, and from the popular favor he had so suddenly arrogated at the expense of that contemptible rabble which had greeted

him as its defender, without a foreboding that it was immediately afterward, through his management, to lie bleeding and trampled under the horses' hoofs. "*C'est tout accompli*, it is all done!" said he to himself.

But he was mistaken. Everything was not yet done. Something still remained.

Into the throng outside the hotel one of Marchioness Egmont's functionaries had also from curiosity stolen to see what the frantic crowd intended further to undertake. Hidden in the street entrance opposite, that faithful servant had with the utmost exasperation been an auditor to those insulting words with which the count had from the balcony overwhelmed his adored mistress, and he was brooding on revenge. So when the tumult on the street was dissipated, and Bertelsköld was still standing in the balcony door, the man in the street entrance picked up a stone and threw it with such an infernal skill that it hit the count just above the left temple, and felled him, bleeding, at the door of the balcony.

The few guests still remaining hurried to him. Count Bertelsköld still lived, but with no hope of recovery. The spider had been slain in the center of his own web.

PART II.—MORNING LIGHT.

INTERLUDE.

"NO, cousin, no, it will never go right," said old grandmother, as she dubiously shook her handsome gray head, with its simple white every-day cap, which Anne Sophie had made for her, and which became her so well.

"What will not go right?" asked the Surgeon, with mischievous face, and looking her fixedly in the eyes.

"To run away, like a simpleton, from husband and child, when there is a household besides to attend to, and she knows she is leaving everything for the girls to turn topsy-turvy. No, I thank you. Such things can be forgiven a little child, who thinks no further than the length of his nose, but not an older person who ought to have more judgment I was pretty sure something would go wrong when Esther Larsson married above her rank, for like agrees best with like, and if one foot is to wear a woolen stocking the other should not be stuck into a silk one. Vain thoughts should not be harbored. I remember that the girl talked very sensibly when the count came to Wasa to woo, but you see it was constantly ringing in her ears to get to be called countess. She was 'a born princess,' do you say, cousin? Pardon me, that is, upon my soul, mere unmeaning talk. She was an honest merchant's daughter, neither more nor less, so far as I understand, and I think she might have been satisfied with that, when she had a suitable livelihood. But you see it did not do for that fine lady to stand in the store and weigh butter like other honest folks; she must keep

on running after 'the queen of the mist's garter,' and so she came in her stocking feet to that aristocratic family. What business had she there?"

"Do you not remember, grandmother, that she gave the count the mitten, and did not accept him until after long reflection, when she saw that his whole happiness depended upon it?" warmly interposed Anne Sophie.

"His happiness! That is what they always say. He must have been a poor sort of a count if he could not take care of himself. He was said to be a pleasant fellow, to be sure, although he was a widower and lived in a castle and had money like grass. He might any time have married some poor *lady*. It now happened, as it often happens in this world, that the high-toned step-children turned up their noses, and people gossiped all sorts of foolishness. But when that had taken place which could no more be altered, I think the new countess ought to have let the odd be even, and not acted as though she cared about the wry faces. What worse was she for them if she had a clean conscience, I would like to know? Since she was so doughty, I would have said, if I had been in her place, 'See here, my dear Bernardus, or whatever your name may be, I advise you to have respect for your father!'"

"Why, she did say that!" exclaimed little Elizabeth Gret, who had shed bitter tears at the sorrowful story in the beginning of the previous narrative.

"Hold your little bill when old people are talking," continued grandmother, with warmth. "Thus and so I should have said in the countess's place, and I should not have advised Sir Bernardus to object, as Spanish as he was. And then I would have remained in my own rightful house, and kept my own regular bunch of keys, and looked after husband and child, and taught the girls manners. But to fly that way in the middle of the night from house and home, like a gypsy woman, because she had received snubs and imperti-

nence—for that, Countess Esther will find it hard to justify herself before God and man. Was the creature stark mad, then? I tell you, cousin, that if you do not send her back soon you will have on your conscience the separation of husband and wife, mother and child, and will have crooked things which always ought to be straight in this world. It is certainly worth while to lay the blame to fate and prophecies and rings, and other poor superstitions, when the legitimate arrangement of God and man is not heeded. And that is the way it was in this case. I wonder, cousin, what you have to object against that?"

"May I now be allowed to express my opinion?" gently inquired the Surgeon.

"Have the goodness to do so, cousin. I am curious to hear you make black into white."

"I have said once before that much depends on the timber of which a person is made. If he is of aspen, he is broken off; if he is of willow, he can be braided into a carpet; but if he is of birch, it happens that he gives the rod to his chastiser. And I think we ought to have seen of what timber Esther Larsson was built. She came, truly not from pride, into that aristocratic family, and found there the strongest birth prejudices of her time already as good as full-grown in her step-children. Had she known them rightly, she would from the beginning have armed herself against them, and reserved to herself an individual abode after the step-children had become of age. But she believed in the power of love to re-create the world, and she believed rightly, only somewhat too early, for a new custom needs generations to develop. She did what great souls are wont to do—she took no precautionary measures, and she thus became dependent upon a prejudice which was stronger than herself. This would have been able to disturb but not to destroy her happiness, if she had only had a husband with stamina enough for her sake to defy prejudices

and support her with an arm of iron. But Count Charles Victor Bertelsköld was as weak as he was good. In his selfish love he was divided between a wife whom he adored and a son whom he idolized. He did not see the deep chasm between the two; he saw the surface and measured not the depth, and he did not understand what his wife suffered. 'It is disagreeable,' he thought, 'but it will all come out right. We must not get up scenes which will compromise us.'"

"What a man!" interposed grandmother. "I had supposed that Charles Victor Bertelsköld was a fine fellow, and now—why, he behaves like a perfect wretch. Could he not have said to his Bertrandus, or whatever his name was: 'Here am I, boy, and here is your mother; you understand! My wish is that you show your step-mother all proper respect, and that is the end of it.'"

"And if he had said that," responded the Surgeon, "what would he have gained by it but the same outer appearance which he would now gain with his weak compliance? But Countess Esther was one of those deep characters who are not contented with appearance. She would have earnestness and truth. Therefore, when she saw that she had been mistaken about the power of love to 'break walls,' she preferred a means which was both unusual and surprising, violent and painful, but such as must also break walls, if it lay in human power. And if she gained nothing else, she at least gained serenity, she at least cut off a chain which would otherwise have slowly killed her. She instantly comprehended her whole situation; she could not remain where she was trodden under foot, constantly standing as a wall of separation between father and child, between brother and brother. But if she went away, nothing more prevented the aristocratic family from again harmonizing. Her husband was weak, her own children were young; the loss of her would pain but not annihilate them. The billows

would close together above her head, and the sea would again be calm."

"I am so angry at Bernhard, that I want to bite him!" exclaimed Anne Sophie. "Poor Paul!"

"Poor Vera!" sobbed Elizabeth Gret.

"Well, I prophesy that their mother will come back when she reflects on the matter; or how is it, cousin?" asked grandmother.

"How am I to know that?" said the Surgeon, with a nod. "It hardly looks so."

"Well, Bertrandus has got a crack for his machinations; but as to Paul," rejoined grandmother, "he seems to be a good young man, though romantic enough. To let himself be shot for his bad brother was an odd idea. He must have had a dubious sort of training, judging by the godless thoughts he at one time had. He can never have had switchings enough over the catechism. And Larsson, the old miser,—we shall see that he will allow himself to be fooled by that German doctor who seems to me to be an old rogue. How can you try, cousin, to make people believe that a person can be a hundred and forty years old?"

"Well," said the Surgeon, "I relate only what others have believed before me. It was just the same a hundred years ago, with the elixir of life and the art of making gold, as with the witches in the days of Charles XI. At the very time when the new light was breaking in, the darkness, for a moment, appeared blacker than ever. In the time of Gustaf III, the natural sciences broke forth like a new flush of morning over the world. It was quite right that the old superstition should then flame up. It was at the time when men knelt before Cagliostro more than before God. Never had alchemy had more zealous adherents than at the very moment when its better daughter, chemistry, was born to the baptism of Scheele and Bergman; and never has humanity more earnestly sought an elixir of life, than when Voltaire and Hol-

bach were teaching that the soul is a substance which must perish with the body."

"Godfather, you must tell us more about the king!" interposed Jonathan, who was not versed in alchemy and chemistry. "Some one who sometime really saw him close by!"

"Oh yes, this is the way he looked," said the Surgeon, as he lifted the little boy up by the ears, while Janathan clung fast to his arms.

CHAPTER I.

THE THRALLDOM OF MAMMON.

REPRESENTATIVE Jonas Bertila had long been wearied of the diet and of the Swedish metropolis. The nearer it drew toward spring, the more meditatively did he walk in leisure hours, for of such he had many, and look at the blue sky, or the frozen sea, hear the larks twitter, and think of his good farm in Storkyro, how the rye blades were looking now that the snow had melted, whether the hands had the judgment to keep matters moving properly in the grain-fields, whether the horses were very poor in the spring, whether the cows and young cattle had been regularly foddered, and if by this time the sheep shearing had begun. At these thoughts, he drew a deep sigh at all his unnecessary perplexity with Hats and Caps, and was greatly tempted to wish the time back when the peasant managed his plow, the burgher his vessel, and the clergyman his catechism, while knights and nobles sketched their family trees, and royal majesty and the crown governed the kingdom according to the written law of the country. So worn out was he, and many thousand others like him, with liberty—or

rather with the liberty of that time,—that for his part he would have been glad to sell the whole constitution for a load of thrashed-out chaff, which would at least be fit for the horses.

One fine afternoon in April, as he was walking toward Roslag's gate, brooding on these thoughts, and without any definite goal for his ramble, he saw a four-wheeled peasant-wagon, drawn by two horses, toilsomely work its way forward through the bottomless mud of the highway. Foot by foot it progressed, after a fashion, until the wagon had arrived a little distance inside the town, where the streets were lumbered with something which was meant to pass for a stone pavement, but which might rather be called the most honorable town council's privileged arrangements for upsetting, so neck-breaking beyond all description were the greater number of the streets of Stockholm at that time. Here neither the driver's art nor the horses' sleepy pace availed, and the wagon lurched on at random, between mountains and valleys, until an unforseen jerk of one of the horses, which had been frightened by a boy's paper kite, finally hastened the catastrophe, and the wagon, with a clumsy somerset, overturned its contents into the middle of the street.

Jonas drew nearer, to see if any one might have been hurt, and found two old men, who with their bundles and rags had rolled down into a good-sized mud-puddle, and were with some difficulty climbing up on dry land again.

"What on earth!" he exclaimed. "Is not this Uncle Lars, from Wasa?"

And sure enough, before him stood a gaunt, white-haired old man, who could be no other than the once tall and stately merchant, Lars Larsson, father of Representative Thomas, and brother of the other representative, Bertel Larsson, but who now, after little more than a year, had shrunken to an odd, hump-backed, bow-legged figure, beneath whose large brown seal-

skin cap a pair of keen gray eyes furtively and restlessly glanced around him. Instead of answering the question, that living mummy hastened to pick up from the street various objects spilled in capsizing, such as a couple of loaves of coarse bread, a pair of ragged leather gloves, and a wooden bottle of sour milk, while with anxious care he satisfied himself that a large traveling trunk in the bottom of the wagon had suffered no injury in the overturning In this, he was not assisted by his companion, a man of singular, foreign appearance, who, both in years and strength, seemed to be considerably younger, but who with a look of indifferent contempt awaited the moment when he could again take his place in the wagon and continue his journey.

"Do you no longer recognize me, uncle?" continued the young representative. "I am Jonas Bertila, and will be glad to show you the way to Thomas's, uncle, in case you would not rather take up quarters with Provost Bertel."

"I don't know, don't know the evil world," replied the bowed, old man. "I am a poor man, a miserably poor old man, who cannot afford to live with such grand gentlemen."

"Drive on!" said the other traveler to the teamster, not at all desirous, it would seem, of making any new acquaintances upon his entry into Stockholm.

The wagon began once more to move on, but so slowly that Jonas could without difficulty follow it at a little distance. "Can uncle have gone crazy in his old age?" thought he to himself. "I will see where they stop."

The road was long enough, for the wagon did not stop until it had gone a long distance into the southern suburb, but Jonas was persistent, and observed the house. It was a kind of barber-shop, whose occupants carried on several kindred industries, such as bleeding, cupping for back-ache, pulling teeth, doctoring horses

for the spavin, and selling *essentia dulcis* as a universal remedy for all evils of both body and soul.

Jonas had plenty of time, and took a walk to Tegelvik. After an hour he returned, and went into the barber-shop to buy *essentia dulcis*.

"You have travelers from a distance?" said he, after having paved the way for the question with a liberal fee.

The barber's man, who was standing at the counter, nodded mysteriously.

"Is it a doctor?"

The barber's man nodded.

"I would like to ask him about a cure for pain in the back," continued Jonas, as for safety's sake he further bought a bottle of Hjärne's Legacy.

"Come in," said the barber's man.

Jonas entered a low, dilapidated room, and, in the room adjoining, heard old Larsson's voice.

"Six shillings a day for lodging and board!" grumbled the old man. "Six shillings! Are you crazy, man? I shall be impoverished by such extravagance. My good people, I am a poor man,—I cannot afford to keep any attendants. Does not some young gentleman live here who needs a boot-black or clothes-brusher? I will serve him for a reasonable price. Tell him I will run errands for three-pence apiece, though I shall wear out four-pence in soles. But a poor beggar like me cannot reckon so nicely. I know Stockholm. I will bring him the newspapers every morning, and carry love-letters for a little pin-money now and then."

"No one lives here except the master and his man," the servant-girl was heard to reply to whatever woful ditty was presented.

"Well, then tell the master that I will work as a servant for my board and lodging. I shall be content with herring and bread, and a cup of water a day, and cannot afford to wear out linen on the bed. I will saw

the master's wood, and serve his customers, for a little pin-money now and then. The young gentlemen who get shaved will pity a poor wretch who has thrown everything he has on the highway to pay the expense of this costly journey to Stockholm."

"Well, what have you there in that large, heavy chest?" asked the girl, in a pert tone.

"I?" exclaimed the old man, perceptibly alarmed. "What have I? Nothing, dear child, nothing. What should I have except old clothes and books, which I intend to sell in Stockholm to get me the necessaries of life."

"I thought it was money," the girl was heard to say in the same tone.

"Heaven preserve me, how sinfully you talk!" responded the old man in a pitiful tone. "From where should such a Lazarus as I get money? My good girl, if you are a Christian being, then tell me how I can earn twelve shillings a week,—it will be a work of compassion for which I shall praise you as long as I live. Money! Bless us, how you do talk!"

"Swear to that," said the girl, rallying him.

"I swear by my soul's salvation, yes, I swear by heaven and earth, my good girl, that there is nothing but rags and books in that old trunk," responded Larsson, with visible anxiety. "Money! I swear that I have nothing but the rags on my back, poor, wretched, impoverished man that I am! The poorest pauper of Stockholm is richer than I am, my good girl!"

"Well, then of course I must believe you," snapped the girl, as she slipped out through the door.

Jonas shuddered, and hesitated whether he should make himself known. To this length, then, had avarice led that old man, who, his whole life through, had been gathering treasure upon treasure, and had surely not come to Stockholm on any other errand than further to increase that mammon which had become at

once his idol and his scourge. But before Jonas had as yet formed his resolution, he heard in the inner room the voice of another man, who had hitherto been mute, and in whom he believed he recognized his uncle's traveling companion.

"You have sworn a false oath," said the other voice. "In the traveling trunk you have eighteen thousand rix-dollars in coined gold, and thirty thousand in bullion gold."

"I? My dear friend, let us not speak about that, let us talk about our business," said Larsson. "We have come to Stockholm to get ingredients for our great, our divine art. We must not waste a moment. Every day costs us at least a thousand rix-dollars which we might make by transmuting iron to gold. A thousand rix-dollars,—that is an awful amount of money! We shall be impoverished by waiting an hour longer."

"But now you have sworn a false oath, and do you know what that means?" rejoined the other.

"There, there, dear friend, that is one way of talking. To-morrow I will put a plåt in the poor-box. The Lord will not make up his account so very precisely with a poor wretch who happens to mis-speak himself in an allowable and pardonable lie of necessity."

CHAPTER II.

THE CONSTELLATION OF THE 14TH OF JANUARY, 1318.

THE singular stranger, who in this manner talked to old Larsson like his evil conscience, now cautiously opened the door, to see if there was any one in the outer room. But the door opened outward, and concealed Jonas Bertila, who was sitting behind

it. He remained unobserved, and did not make known his presence. It was no trouble for him to listen, and he regarded it as a duty, the more so as he now remembered that the stranger could be no other than the alchemist and miracle-doctor, Martin Weis, who at Larsson's request had the last summer accompanied the old man from Åbo to Wasa.

What had induced Doctor Weis for a whole year to bury himself and his art far up in a provincial town of the north? Jonas had, indeed, heard a report that he robbed and deluded old Larsson with his pretended art of making gold; but he now found that Larsson brought with him a whole trunk full of that precious metal. If Doctor Weis was the rascal and deceiver that many represented him, what could have hindered him, who was younger, stronger and craftier than the old miser, from murdering and robbing him during the long journey around Norrbotten? Both, however, had arrived here safe and sound, and, as it seemed, in a state of harmony. Jonas was curious to get an explanation of this enigma.

He soon understood that Doctor Weis, with all his caution, was not omniscient. The wonder-worker did not suspect that behind that thin door he had an unknown listener, who did not lose a word of the conversation in however low a voice it was carried on between the two traveling companions.

"I have now served you more than a half-year," said the doctor. "I have carried out your wishes and transmuted for you eleven lispunds of iron to gold. That which you carry with you in your trunk is but a small part of your treasures, for the most of it you have buried, or walled in, in Wasa, and I have not asked you where . . . . "

"For God's sake," stammered Larsson, "think what you are saying! What if the walls had ears? I, poor man, have nothing, nothing at all! Where should I have buried so much money?"

"That is true," calmly continued the doctor; "you are poor, miserably poor; yes, poorer, with all your gold, than the beggar who in his poverty still has the heart to sing when he has eaten his fill. You are poorer than the most wretched pauper, for he can at least sleep and forget, but that you cannot do. You are poorer than the dog which is made happy by a bone on the dust-heap, for the dog can growl when he is struck, but you caress the hand that boxes your ear, because that hand reaches you gold. You are so wretched that if I were your worst enemy, and had wished to strike you out of the book of humanity, I should not have had the power to sink you lower in the depth of misfortune and degradation. I am not your friend, for if I were I should not have thrown gold-piece after gold-piece into your insatiable mouth, and by that means made you still thirstier. But neither am I your enemy, for why should I hate such a pitiable being? Is it not enough that I despise you? Friendship and enmity signify to me less than nothing. I neither hate nor love any mortal. My way goes far above the heads of humanity, and I look down on mankind as wanderers through the forest look at the course of the ants between the fallen and withered pine-needles. There was something, however, which bound me to such a miserable slave as you. Has it not surprised you that I have never asked any recompense for my trouble?"

"Recompense?" exclaimed Larsson, with a start. "What should I, poor man, be able to offer you other than my gratitude, my admiration?"

"What do I care about your gratitude and your admiration? When the day comes that you no longer need me, you will wish me where pepper grows."

"But you do not mean to desert me? It is impossible, doctor; we have still so much undone! After we have procured new ingredients we shall make mountains of gold, shall we not? And you shall have

a fair share, doctor! We will draw up the contract. You shall have ten per cent, for you see I advance the money, and you are my partner! What do you say to that, doctor? Is it not a good business? Ten per cent—that is a handsome, a large fee, and perhaps—perhaps, if you are really industrious, you shall have—eleven per cent!" added the old man, with a deep sigh over his own liberality.

"And what would hinder my taking ninety-nine per cent, and leaving to you what the iron is worth?" mockingly rejoined the doctor.

"Oh, you cannot do that, my dear sir doctor! You cannot in that way cheat a poor old man who has shown you so much confidence. But if you will not agree for less, then—you shall have twelve per cent!"

"Listen to me! If you still have a spark of sound sense in your dried-up brain, you ought to understand that gold is of no consequence to me. What hinders my paving the streets of Stockholm with that metal if I so choose? You have something which is now without significance to you, but which is worth more to me than all the gold the earth contains. That is what I now ask as a recompense for my long labor, and you can yourself decide what you will still have me do for you."

"What can it be?" asked the old man, anxiously curious. "Is it my youngest daughter, Kathrina? Take her, doctor, take her! She shall be yours if you will promise me, let's see—eleven more lispunds. That is to say, eleven lispunds this year, and afterward just as much every year;—or what do you think yourself?"

"Look at the usurer! He is ready to sell his own child! But calm yourself; I think quite as little of women as of gold. Can I not in my crucibles make me the fairest woman on which the sun has shown since the days of our mother Eve? But I despise such playthings. I ask something else."

"You spoke once about my soul," replied Larsson,

trembling at the thought of losing his ally. "It is a sinful bargain, doctor, but perhaps—we might come to an agreement."

The doctor laughed. "That I can easily believe," said he. "You would be willing to sell your soul for a false ducat. But now if I were the evil one himself, of what use would it be to buy such a miserable commodity, which in any case belongs to me? I am not the evil one; I am a man, like you, or rather, more than you, for you are only the dried-up shell of a human being. I will be honest with you, for this hour is decisive. Do you understand me?"

"I will try . . . ."

"I am simply a man, who has made it the study of his life to penetrate into the secrets of nature, though not like the *savants* of the present, who prick only into trifling phenomena, and are blind to the mysterious powers which govern the universe. As you know, I have been successful in one thing and another, but I still lack one means of swaying the influence of the stars. I have read in my compasses that once every five hundred years a conjunction of the three most powerful planets, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn, occurs, and a talisman forged under that constellation is able through their united power to govern all the other planets. But that constellation lasts only eight minutes, fourteen seconds, forty-nine tierces, and not a tierce more or less must be consumed in the forging. On account of the difficulty of being thus prepared at the decisive moment, and then industriously making use of it, only *one* such talisman has ever been forged by man, and that must have happened when the conjunction last occurred, the fourteenth of January, 1318, at three o'clock and twenty-eight minutes in the afternoon. My circles have told me that that powerful emanation of the planets still exists, and my star compass has told me that it must be somewhere in the

north. That is the reason why I set out from Sicily, where I made the discovery, to Finland."

Here the doctor paused, and afterward continued:

"I came to Åbo, and in vain sought for the rare jewel. The common people looked upon me as a magician, and the learned regarded me as a charlatan. What did I care for that? I sought but did not find. The compass gave me to understand that the young fop Bertelsköld stood in some relation to the jewel. I sifted him, but found myself deceived. One day my compass became wonderfully restless, and immediately afterward it stood still. Then I understood that what I sought was to be found with some person in my vicinity, and at the same moment you entered. But you had not the jewel with you, you had it in Wasa. That is the reason why I went with you, and served you, and loaded you with gold. I now demand my recompense."

"How should I, poor man, be able to own such a powerful thing?" whispered Larsson.

"Think not," continued the doctor, "that I have forgotten to make myself well-informed. An announcement in the churches by Count Bertelsköld led me further on the track, and I now know all. Twenty years ago you allowed yourself to steal a ring from a young student of Åbo. It was that ring which I have sought through half the world. It was that ring which was forged on the fourteenth of January, 1318, at three o'clock and twenty eight minutes in the afternoon, under the united influence of Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn, and whose might has been further strengthened by Finnish witchcraft and the wonder-working power of the saints. For two hundred years it was worn on the finger of an image of the Virgin Mary, but when the images were destroyed it came into individual hands, and has since been in the possession now of the Bertelsklölds, and now of others, everywhere with the same astonishing power, which no one, however, has as yet understood how

fully to use. All the fools who have worn it have sought by it only their own happiness, and you yourself have used it to heap treasure upon treasure, while its power over nature is still seven-fold stronger than over man. In short, that ring you must give up to me!"

"I cannot do that," replied Larsson, with unexpected decision. "Ask something else!"

"You cannot?" sharply responded the doctor. "You do not know, then, that that ring is irreparably lost by perjury, and only by perjury? Why do you suppose I have for years patiently waited for the time when you might forfeit the power of your talisman? Why have I not been able to steal it from you as you had stolen it from another? Because you had been wary. But to-day you have sworn falsely, and now my hour is come. Now you must give me the ring. Do you understand? It must be done."

"Never!" cried Larsson.

"What, miserable slave! you venture to defy the ruler of the elements!" burst out the doctor, as he seized the old man by the throat.

"Help! Help!" shrieked Larsson in a stifled voice.

Jonas Bertila delayed no longer. He burst open the door, rushed in, and threw himself upon the two combatants, when, after a violent struggle, the younger and stronger man at last conquered. Pale with rage, the doctor was obliged to let go his hold, and with threats hurried away.

"Come, I will take you to your son Thomas," said Bertila, lifting up the almost helpless old man, who, scarcely able to speak, still whispered, "My trunk! my trunk!"

Jonas stooped down, and picked up from the floor a faintly gleaming object.

It was the king's ring.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE HUNTING-LODGE AT BRUNSWICK.

THE beautiful park of Stockholm, the Zoölogical Garden, so carefully tended, so widely visited, and adorned with villas and summer residences, was as yet, in the beginning of Gustaf III's reign, a perfectly wild and wretched hunting-ground, of which only the south-western shore, or the so-called town of the Zoölogical Garden, with the dock-yard, was built up with little tenements belonging to the admiralty. In all the rest of the extensive park, only here and there was seen a little red-painted wooden house, occupied by the huntsmen, and shaded by the rustic beauty of oaks and lindens.

One of those secluded dwellings, with a view toward Brunswick, was situated about where now the castle of Rosendal, with its large porphyries, looks down upon graveled walks and circular flower-borders. Here lived one of the huntsmen of the park, with the title of court-hunter, by the name of Grenman, a son of the old book-keeper and functionary of the Larsson house in Wasa. Court-Hunter Grenman was a good-natured and faithful man, like his father, and had not forgotten that it was the old burgher king who had made his fortune betimes, by recommending him in his young days to a place in the hunting service, where he had afterward advanced to his present important position. So when one fine, spring day a badly wounded young man by the name of Paul Bertelsköld was brought to his dwelling, he was heartily glad to be able at last to repay some part of his debt of gratitude.

That young guest had in the beginning given him

much anxiety, for, as the ball could not be extracted, the surgeon gave up all hope. But fortunately there was another person, who was both tenderer and stouter-hearted, and who would not at all allow herself to be persuaded that at nineteen years of age one can die of such a trifling thing as a ball, which had only injured a lobe of the right lung, and remained un-extracted near the spine. It was the same "Mora from Östanlid," who had already, in the peasant-hut near Solna, taken charge of the wounded young man, and who now, since the surgeon had been politely dismissed with a suitable fee for his trouble and his silence, had alone taken upon herself the responsibility and charge of the young man's restoration.

The court hunting-master soon perceived to his delight that his patient could not have fallen into better hands. Mora from Östanlid was no tyro in the art. No practicing surgeon could more skillfully than she apply a bandage or quiet a wound fever, and no pupil of Esculapius could compare with her in unwearying attention to the least wishes of the patient. For the first week, she watched day and night by his bed, and not until after the ninth day, when the danger was past and the wound began rapidly to heal, did she grant herself a few moments' rest on a mattress at the side of her *protégé*.

And with what tenderness, with what unspeakable gratitude, did the young man's eyes then rest on Mora from Östanlid! Those who think that a young man's love can never with the whole heart attach itself to an elderly woman are much mistaken. There is no love more heartfelt or pure than that with which Paul Bertelsköld rewarded the same feeling with his gentle nurse, and if ever on earth glows a reflex of that love with which the angels of heaven love each other, then it must be such an unspotted, self-denying, all-ennobling love between—mother and son.

For why should we conceal what the reader has

probably long suspected? Who but a mother could with that tender, that all-foreseeing watchfulness follow the steps of an inexperienced, enthusiastic, hot-headed youth? Who but a cast-off, crushed woman could find her delight and comfort in such a reunion? Who but "Esther Larsson, once Countess Bertelsköld," could in that way devote her whole affection to her sole remaining darling, her heart's child, her Paul?

There was one other woman who was straying restlessly about in search of his foot-prints, but her love was built of different timber.

There was one moment in that lonely hunting-lodge, which Countess Esther had at once feared and longed for, and that was the moment when Paul should for the first time recognize his mother.

During the whole nine days she had made the great sacrifice of carefully concealing her face from him, and remaining unrecognizable in her peasant costume, for fear that the joy and surprise might kill him in her arms. During those nine days, without a suspicion as to who was his nurse, he had received medicine from her trembling hand, and with emotions of gratitude been witness to her increasing care. He felt an inexplicable affection for this unknown peasant woman, who continually wore her black cloth drawn down so low across the forehead, and who never had any other answer to his questions than a silent, friendly nod. But one day when she was sitting on a footstool by his bed, and believed him to be sleeping, she had then, wearied out by over-work and watching, leaned her head against the edge of the bed, her eyelids, against her will, had closed, and unconsciously she had fallen asleep. Paul was not asleep. For awhile he had regarded her in silent surprise, then he had softly pushed the black cloth away from her forehead, to see for once who that mysterious woman was, to whom he was indebted for his life,—and the longer he looked upon those pale but beautiful features, and the closed eye-

lids with their black silken lashes, the higher had swelled a warm wave as it were around his heart, his tears had begun, like a brimful fountain, to stream out from their concealed deep, and he had put both his arms around the neck of the unknown but now recognized sleeping woman. Then she had awakened, then her two dark eyes, which Paul in his childhood had so greatly admired, and which to his taste had not their equal in all the wide world,—those two shining suns had all at once come out of the cloud, and looked at him with an unutterable love,—and then mother and son, after long years of pain and separation, were once more folded in each other's arms. Such moments can never be forgotten; they belong to eternity, and can never be effaced from memory, either in this life or the next.

Then the mother had at last, with gentle force, put her son from her, and covered his brow with kisses, and compelled him to seek rest and calm, and Paul had once more fallen asleep, with the happiest feeling he had ever known. What henceforth signified his transient physical pain? Everything now was again well, now he again had his mother, now *he* was not alone, now *she* was not alone in the world, now he should nevermore be separated from her, now he could have her his whole life to make her happy. And Paul blessed the ball which had gone so near his heart, only to bring it so great a joy; he even felt grateful to his cruel brother, without whose unlovely conduct he should not have enjoyed the blessedness of this reunion.

The day following, mother and son had regained sufficient composure to open their hearts to each other, and mutually relate everything which had occurred during their separation. Paul's story was candid, and without any reservation; but his mother could not be equally frank. In her story she was obliged to shield a weak father and a heartless brother,—and she did it

with such a subtle delicacy that at last the whole blame of her sorrows paused at the powerful prejudices of the time, and the differences of rank which as yet the individual tried in vain to defy and break down.

"What blind, weak beings are we all!" said she. "Why should we attempt perfection on earth? The time will come, my Paul, when no human being will by birth be better or worse than others, and when no other nobility shall exist than a man's or woman's own human worth. But that insight bears within itself alone a whole new period; and why should we complain that the tall oak does not instantly stand full-grown, when we see its seed take root in the earth at our feet? Many tears are yet to flow, and many sighs to be sent up to heaven, before the prejudices of rank have dissolved like the winter drifts in the sunshine of spring. Let us with patience bide a better time; and you, my Paul, who are a man, work, work faithfully for the rights of humanity, and the future is yours!"

"Yes, mother," replied Paul, "I have already thought of that. In Upsala, I have made the acquaintance of a young student by the name of Thorild. If you only knew how often we have talked on this very same subject, and how all mankind shall some day be free and equal! . . . . But you have not yet told me anything about your flight from Falkby."

"Let us talk about something pleasanter," said the mother, evasively. "At present I will merely confide to you that I had, the previous evening, talked over my flight with the widow Flinta and her grandson, over on the point. The boy rowed me across the water, and the rest I will talk about some other time."

"Say, mother, now that you have me and I have you, shall we not both return to Falkby, to Vera and father?"

Countess Esther turned away. That was something on which she could not yet open her heart. She only replied:

"Do not talk so much, my dear Paul; it will fatigue you. When you get well we can consult about our future."

Paul's convalescence, however, progressed from that day with double rapidity. The ball still remained, but the internal injuries were almost entirely healed, and he received permission to sit by the window and look at the trees and meadows, which were beginning to brighten their verdure in the spring sunshine.

"I will now leave you for a few days," said his mother. "Will you promise me carefully to bear in mind all my directions?"

"Yes, mother; but where are you going?"

"To another duty, of which you shall afterwards know. God protect you, darling of my heart! Farewell!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE BORDER OF ETERNITY.

IF, now that the park was leafless, the gray mass of towers and chimneys which away to the west represented Stockholm, had been carefully scanned from an attic window of the little hunter's lodge at Brunswick, the roof of that lofty house on Drottning Street, where Count Bernard Bertelsköld lay badly wounded in the head by that stone which an unknown hand had thrown at him during that riot in the night nearly two weeks ago, might possibly have been distinguished. Every day had the most skillful physicians of Stockholm gathered in his parlor for consultation; all remedies had been resorted to, and still there seemed to be no improvement. The left eye was thought to be lost, and, what was worse, the contusion had produced such a serious effect on the brain, that the physicians, even

if his life could be saved, thought they could not foresee anything but a weakness of mind and an utter debility of all the mental faculties. Gradually one Esculapius after another withdrew, and only the king's body-physician, at royal command, still came to make daily inquiries as to his condition, while he prescribed some of those remedies physicians give on such occasions, when they have lost all hope and are only trying to keep up the courage of the patient as long as possible.

Count Bernhard had some political friends who, from politeness, came to show him their sympathy. Personal friends he had none, and as even his sister, Baroness Clairfeld, at that time was obliged to leave Stockholm, in order, by the first opening of navigation, to go back to her husband in Germany, not a single one remained who showed him any real sympathy. José, the *valet*, who had hitherto been his confidential tool, the count could no longer bear; it became necessary to dismiss the Spaniard from the house, and the new domestics, hired in Stockholm, now became the only society and nurses of the wounded man.

Count Bernhard often suffered so intensely from physical pain that he wished to die; but more than that did he in calmer moments suffer from the indescribably disconsolate feeling of being alone in the world. What, at such times, would he not have given to be able to buy one single real friend, one single hand-pressure of affection; yes, one single sympathizing word right from the heart?—but they were not for him! And then that dark, bitter pride again won the mastery over him, and, cursing God and man, he promised himself that if he became well again he would be revenged on all that cold, heartless race which had abandoned him in his misfortune. He would incite them against each other; he would set the world aflame, and amid its desolation, defiant and

sneering, see that pitiable and despicable race destroy itself.

Sleepless and suffering, he had one night been torturing himself with those wild, delirious, feverish thoughts. He had asked the physician about his condition, and received an evasive answer, from which he well understood that his days, perhaps hours, were now numbered. He had thus not even the consolation of being revenged. His brilliant career was now to be abruptly broken off; he was going to die at the hand of a miserable assassin, mourned by none, wept by none, or at most by a father, who would comfort himself by the survivors. And who was to be his successor in the inheritance? Paul, whom he hated,—what a humiliation! His step-mother, whom he abhorred,—what mockery! Why had he not married, at least to leave behind him a son who could dispute the rights of these hated kinsmen? He was only thirty years old; he could still make amends for that neglect,—but no, he had only a few hours to live! What if he should make use of those hours to solemnize his marriage on the sick-bed? With whom? With any one whomsoever. His widow would at least give his step-mother and Paul the vexation of sharing the inheritance with them. Where was he quickly enough to get a suitable countess? She must be of high birth, that was plain; she ought to be able to look down on the plebeian blood which had intruded into the family. But who would lend herself as an instrument of his revenge? His thoughts ran hither and thither, but found no one suitable.

During these thoughts a trance of weakness, toward morning, stole over his eyelids. He was not asleep, he was not awake, he still clearly recognized every object in the room, and the old hired nurse, whose business it was to watch over him, but who was nodding in a corner of the room. He lay in that condition of half-

consciousness when a veil falls over the activity of the mind without its altogether ceasing.

Then on the green tapestry of the opposite wall he saw a faint blue-white glow, which seemed to be a reflection from the faintly flickering lamp. But if it was only a reflection, why did it increase, why did it gradually become clearer, and why did it form itself more and more plainly into a human shape? Count Bernhard could not turn his eyes away from it. He was not sufficiently conscious to reflect upon it; it did not surprise him, and yet he had dwelt too long within the bright circle of the new French philosophy to believe in ghosts, or in fact in anything at all. Indifferently, but with unaverted gaze, he watched the singular phenomenon.

After awhile, the light had, as it were, flowed together into an image of a pale, gentle, sad woman, in the costume of a long-gone period. She floated away from the wall, and noiselessly approached the bed of the wounded man. She leaned over him, and seemed to kiss his bandaged head. Yet he was not surprised; he did not draw back; he felt something like the sweet breath of flowers sweep across his burning temples and spread over them a balmy coolness.

Then he was conscious of something like words, but they were not sounds which his ear caught, they were more like thoughts which inaudibly passed into his own thoughts, and thereby received an expression which resembled words from human lips. "Bernhard Bertelsköld!" said that pale, sorrowful and gentle form; "I am the maternal ancestor of your family. Why have you so deeply grieved me?"

Count Bernhard did not reply. What could he answer?

"Know," continued the phantom, "that a curse and a blessing have from the beginning struggled for the destiny of your family. Two of your forefathers have passed away from earth cursed, and two blessed.

The third on whom the curse rests is you; and to-day, at the noontide hour, your time has been appointed you. But I have embraced our Saviour's knees, and in his name prayed that you might yet be given one year on earth for amendment. Turn, turn, turn from your sinful way! Behold, the hand which is to heal you is near. One year is yours, in which to seek reconciliation in heaven and on earth; but if that year goes by and your soul is not turned from darkness to light, then shall darkness have its prey, and the third curse shall be fulfilled on our race."

At these words, the pale form grew paler and more transparent, the outlines of the figure seemed to lose themselves in air, and soon only the former faint blue-white light was seen on the opposite wall, until even that finally died away, and only the expiring lamp cast a faint glow over the twilight of the room.

Count Bernhard felt two opposing streams well up from the hidden fountains of his heart. While the old sneer would steal forth on his lips, something quite different stole out from under his eyelashes, and it resembled something which had never been visible there since the days of his childhood,—it resembled almost a tear. If he had been in clear consciousness, he would have said to himself, "It is from the weakness of sickness." But now he had not the strength to be angry at it; his weary eyes closed, and he fell into a real slumber, which lasted several hours.

When he awakened, it had been broad daylight for some time, and the doctor was standing by his bed. A shadowy memory of the night's vision seemed to float before the wounded man, and he abruptly asked:

"Is it at noon to-day that I am to die?"

"Do not disturb yourself with such thoughts, my dear lord count!" the doctor again replied, evasively. "We shall try everything in the power of art."

"Since your art has so little power," exclaimed the count bitterly, "it would be more honest of you, doc-

tor, to tell me the whole truth. I am a man, and do not fear death; so tell me plainly, how many hours have I to live?"

"If my lord count must needs know it," replied the doctor, "I must confess that the inflammation is increasing. In an hour you will become delirious, never to recover your reason. If you would like to order a notary to draw your will, he ought to be summoned quickly."

"Well, wretched quacks that you all are," responded the wounded man, "since it is still mine to order, I order you this moment to go away. I no longer need you!"

The physician shook his head, and, as he went, whispered to the nurse: "The raving has already begun. It will be safest for you to send for a strong man, for he will be hard to control."

The nurse departed, and the count remained alone. "Go, I despise you and all your art, pitiable braggarts!" cried he, after the retreating physician. "I am thirty years old, and a miserable stone from the street puts an end to my life Well, I can despise life as I despise you all! I am glad to make an end of the wretched farce."

"You are not going to die, you shall live," whispered a gentle voice, and beside him stood a peasant woman, with a black cloth drawn down low across the forehead.

"Who are you?" asked the count, as he remembered at the same time the vision of the night.

"They call me Mora from Östanlid, and I have come to make you well."

CHAPTER V.

THE OLD AND THE NEW MAN.

THE royal body-physician, who had all day vainly awaited the news of Count Bertelsköld's expected demise, the following morning could not control his curiosity, and went to the hotel. "When did the count die?" he asked the nurse in the outer room.

"*Serra tri*," replied the madam, with a toss of the head; "he slept all night, and has just asked for a cup of broth."

"Impossible!" responded the doctor. "According to all the rules of science, he must have gone to pieces last night at latest."

"That is just what I have said," responded the nurse. "But that is the way it goes when a man disdains the medicine of royal majesty, and gives himself into the hands of witches."

"Aha! Is that the way of it? Then he will not last till evening."

"You're right about that. When a person throws all the medicine-bottles out of the window, and drives the barber with his lancet out-doors, and wraps up a sick head with wet linen bandages, what can come of it but death?"

"What is the old witch's name?"

"They call her Mora from Östanlid, and she is said to have cured many people whom the doctors had not got the better of. But I think, those whom she has cured will get fleeced in the long run."

"That is very probable," rejoined the body-physician, smiling and withdrawing, secretly not very well pleased with the many wise old women who at that

time presumed to cure or kill people without the consent of the doctors.

It looked, however, as if the body-physician might prove to be right, as for several days Count Bernhard hovered between life and death. Mora from Östanlid had a hard battle to fight, much harder than she had had with Paul. But in spite of the unanimous verdict of the faculty, Count Bernhard gradually recovered, the fever was allayed, the inflammation was removed, there was even hope for the eye, and only an excessive debility remained. That which would not exactly recover was his former courage. That night when he was lying at the gate of death, and saw, or thought he saw, that strange vision, his austere, haughty soul had received a heavy blow. Those wonderful, soundless words, "Turn!" and "One year!" had left behind them an echo which would not altogether pass away. He was angry at himself for those childish fancies which did not give him any peace; but that did not avail,—they lay continually before him.

"Mora," said he impatiently one day to the silent, black-clad peasant-woman, who with such unceasing care had watched over him night and day, "when do you think I shall be well?"

"Your body will be well at the same time as your soul," she replied in a low voice.

"What do you mean by that? What is lacking with my soul?"

"The grace of God, which is the soul's health," seriously replied the woman.

Count Bernhard tried to laugh, but failed. He was too weak. Again he recalled that fearful "Turn!" and was silent. Something was germinating within him, deep, deep beneath the ruins of his former proud self-confidence, but the soil down there was hard and stony, and the seed would not take root.

"Mora," said he the next day, "if you succeed in

making me well, I will make you rich. You shall fix your own fee."

"I ask nothing," was the reply.

"So they all say," rejoined the count, "but they take, for all that. Where are you from?"

"From Finland."

"You are of the right sort. Listen, Mora,—somewhere in Finland there is something that can make me well faster than you can, and that is a poor old ring. If you can get me that, then—let's see, then I will—marry you!"

This was a thoughtless continuation of the sick man's former ideas, which struck him for the very reason that it was so *bizarre*. But Mora from Östanlid, without any indication of surprise, asked:

"Why would you do that?"

"Why? Because it is the fashion in my family. I have a step-mother who would be glad to get you for a daughter-in-law. It is an old rule that evil is to be cast out with evil—frost-bites with snow, burn-blisters with hot iron, and Finnish witches with Finnish witches. Do not scruple because you perhaps have seventy years on your shoulders! The older the better. It will cure my step-mother."

"Why do you hate your step-mother?"

"Why? Because she . . . . but that does not concern you."

"Perhaps at this moment she is praying for you..."

"She is too high-tempered and proud for that. She hates me more than I hate her."

"If you believe that, you perhaps do her injustice."

"No, there is no one in the world who cares anything about me,—no one more than you, Mora! My sister has deserted me, my brother abhors me, and my father . . . I have an idea. You are too old for me, but if you will get me the ring, I will marry you to my father. He is not very particular, and I am used to step-mothers."

"Think of your soul! Such thoughts are like stones

in a loaded boat, and with such words you will never get well!" seriously and somewhat sternly warned the nurse. She clearly saw that the hard heart was far from subdued.

Again the wounded man tried to laugh, but he could not.

"My head aches," he moaned.

As the nurse was going out to get some cold water, she met, in the outer room, a young peasant who asked to speak to the count.

"Tell me your errand, and I will perform it," replied Mora from Östanlid.

"I can come back another time," said the peasant. "I wish to give the count something which has been lost."

"Is it a ring?" asked the peasant-woman with that sudden inspiration which was so characteristic of her.

"Yes, it is a ring," said the peasant, surprised.

"Then give it to me. The count has just been talking about it. He longs for his ring, he thinks of it day and night, but it is not good for him."

Jonas Bertila shook his head. "I do not know you," he said, "and there is said to be some strange deviltry about that old bit of copper. I will not give it to any one but the count himself."

At these words the peasant woman threw back the cloth which covered her forehead, and disclosed a face of so much nobility and elevation of expression, that Jonas involuntarily raised his hand to find whether he had forgotten the cap on his head.

"Do I look able to deceive you?" she asked.

"Pardon me," said Jonas. "Here is the ring, and as the count offered a reward of five hundred dollars to any one who should get back the rubbish for him, have the kindness to say to him that he can give the money to the poor of Storkyro parish. Not that we really have any poor in Storkyro," shrewdly added the peasant, "but it may be as well to have the money in

case we should happen to have a year or two of bad crops."

"Remember me to your mother, Jonas!" said the peasant-woman, as she took the ring, covered her face, and disappeared through the nearest door.

Jonas stood there in great perplexity. "Have I acted foolishly or wisely? Where have I seen that face before?" thought he to himself, with a dim recollection from childhood's days. "But it is all the same. I am glad to be rid of the good-for-nothing troll-trash. Ever since I found it on the barber's floor, I have had the nightmare every single night."

Mora from Östanlid meantime stood in the room adjoining, looking at the ring, which had once so powerfully influenced her own fate. She had then been inclined to bless its potency, and yet,—who would have ventured to say that it would not have been better for her if that ring had still lain buried in the sand eighteen hundred fathoms below the surface of the sea in Wasa roadstead!

She had scarcely seen, and never wore, the ring. She now held it up to the light. How wonderfully it was put together! How rare was its faint luster! And those letters of which she had so often heard,—how legible they still seemed on the inside of the ring!

She shuddered when she remembered Neptunus Gast. Was there really any truth in the awful power attributed to this insignificant bit of copper? Was it true that it had already led many human beings to temporal and eternal ruin? And was it true that every one who wore it could all at once transform the darkest night of disaster to the brightest day of happiness, in fact, that the very moment it passed into another hand, a human destiny was immediately altered?

A wonderful temptation entered her mind. Had not the wounded man in there promised her just now, in exchange for this ring, to marry her to—her husband? If she now handed him the longed-for jewel,

would she not have her step-son's own consent to return with all the rights of a wife? Or, if she retained the ring, would not its lauded power before long lead her to the goal of her wishes, to a regained happiness, to reconciliation and peace? For one moment, she fought hard against the temptation. The next moment she again shuddered at the evil impulses which seemed almost magnetically to stream out from that demoniac ring.

Mora from Östanlid was still standing immersed in these thoughts, when she heard a voice behind her — that voice which, of all voices on earth, most deeply penetrated her heart. It was the voice of her husband, Count Charles Victor Bertelsköld.

"How is it with the count? Does he still live?" asked the trembling voice.

"He lives," replied the peasant-woman, scarcely audibly, and supporting herself against the window casement, to keep from sinking to the floor.

"Is he sufficiently restored so that he can without danger see his father?" eagerly inquired Count Bertelsköld, without paying any attention to the emotion of the unknown woman.

She found a few seconds in which to regain composure. "Yes," she whispered, "but on the condition that your grace will not say anything which will excite or grieve him, for he is still very weak."

"That is good; I will be careful," replied the count, as he entered the private room.

His unrecognized wife, with silent step, followed him. There was a screen across the corner, and no one observed her. She heard and saw all, with her heart far more than with eye and ear. Oh, how the beloved of her youth had aged in these ten months since they last saw each other! How gray his hair had grown, and how pale his cheek! How bent his once proud form, and how dim the luster of his mild blue eye! But she loved him still, yes, she knew that she

loved him more than ever before, for she had brought sorrow to him, she who had sworn to be the joy of his life!

The reunion between father and son was warmer than their unseen witness had ventured to hope. The father, in the delight of again finding his first-born alive, forgot everything; the son felt a need of love which he had never experienced before.

"Father," said Bernhard, "I have deeply offended you . . . ."

"We will talk about that when you get well," said the count. "Providence has sent us these trials to punish us and amend our great defects—your pride and my weakness. I have hurried to Stockholm to save all which is dear to me in life, my lost wife, my two sons, and the honor of our family. I come not in my own strength, but in the power of God which I feel within me. There must no longer be darkness and hatred around us. We shall all, all adore the mercy of the Almighty."

At that moment, Count Charles Victor Bertelsköld was noble and proud. All the unmanly weakness which had for awhile shaded his just and really high-souled character, now that he was so near losing everything that attached him to life, seemed suddenly lost. He stood there manly and erect, firmly resolved to fight against his fate, and save his dear ones.

"How beautiful he is! How beautiful he is!" thought his unseen, unknown wife, in her hidden nook, while she was ready to throw herself into his arms, and kiss as of old his dear gray curls, and his lofty, gentle, care-furrowed brow.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BATTLE FOR A HUMAN SOUL.

THAT day, when Mora from Östanlid sat only a few steps from her lost husband, who did not suspect her presence, and when it depended only upon her to throw herself into his open arms, and be received with tears of delight, that day the tempter came to her with a power he had rarely exerted on the heart of woman. The insidious thoughts returned with redoubled strength. "Go," said the tempter, "make yourself known, and put an end to your bitter sorrow! Do you still fear your step-son's hatred? Foolish one! Do you not possess the king's ring? Do you not know that you will now be successful in everything? No wish can arise in your heart so bold that it will not immediately be accomplished; and besides, have you forgotten that Bernard has promised to give you unknown to your husband again if you will restore him the ring?"

What an enticement! What a hard conflict! But the poor rejected woman did not yield. She felt that her time had not yet come. The ring burned in her hand, and she knew that it might possibly have been the temporal salvation of her *protégé*, but the more surely his eternal ruin. Motionless and silent she sat, and heard the two men, father and son, talk about her.

"I want to go to body-physician Dalberg and thank him for his care of you," said the count.

"Do so, father, and thank him for his particular care in passing me over to immortality," replied Bernhard, in his old mocking tone. "But, father, if you want to thank the one who has kept me on earth,

think of some reward for a Finnish witch who has been my nurse. I have no fancy for witches, but Mora from Östanlid is a rare exception, for she alone has thought me worthy to live when all others thought me worthy to die."

"I shall not forget to give her a suitable reward," replied the count, as he arose to go, for the visit must not be too long.

As he passed out, he observed Mora from Östanlid, who, as long as possible, concealed herself behind the screen.

"Are you the one who has taken care of my son?" he asked.

Mutely, and with the cloth drawn low over her head, she nodded.

"I thank you," said the count. "Keep on caring for him, and you can count on my gratitude. For a beginning, take this as a proof of it," and as he passed a gold coin into her hand he felt the hand tremble.

"You have sat up too much, you need to take some rest," continued the count, with a transient sympathy, and departed.

"Oh!" thought she who was left alone, "if *he* had stood before me in the most impenetrable disguise, and I had pressed his hand and felt it tremble in mine, *I* should instantly have recognized him!"

Several days after this elapsed. Count Bernhard's strength increased, and time began to grow tedious to him.

"Bring me a French romance!" said he to his nurse, in a commanding tone.

She went out, and returned with a book, but it was not a French romance, it was Thomas à Kempis; and she sat down to read aloud from the book.

"What?" said the wounded man angrily, "do you venture to play tricks on me?"

But she went on reading:

"My God, look thou upon me, and be not far from me. Evil thoughts are arisen within me, and great terror troubles my soul. How am I to vanquish them unharmed?"

"'I will go before thee,' saith the Lord, 'and abase the great and glorious on earth. I will open the gates of thy prison, and reveal unto thee hidden things.'"

Count Bernhard did not easily fall into a passion, but he was now overcome with violent anger. On the toilet table by the bed lay a psalm-book, with board covers and brass clasps. He seized the book, and threw it so violently at his nurse that the blood streamed from her nose and mouth.

She turned away to wipe her face, and afterward continued as calmly as if nothing had happened:

"Lord, do with me as thou hast said, and all evil thoughts shall flee before thy face. Behold, I am not worthy thy consolation, and the care thou hast of me. I have deeply sinned, and all my desire has been to earthly things. I have exalted myself higher than the heavens, and must be abased to the depth of the earth. All that is within me is sin and darkness, unless thy holy spirit maketh my darkness light. Lord, have compassion on me, and make the light of thy countenance to shine upon me! Rebuke the winds and the tempests! Say unto the sea: Be still! and to the north-wind: Blow not!—and there shall be a great calm."

"Crazy old woman, with your miserable monk-sermon!" muttered the sick man as he turned to the wall in order not to hear her.

But she kept on reading:

"'My son,' saith the Lord, 'deny thyself and thou shalt find me!'—'Lord, how often shall I deny myself, and wherein shall I deny?'—'Always and everywhere, in the little and in the great. I take nothing away, but in everything I wish to find thee destitute. How else canst thou be mine and I thine?"

"Often have I said unto thee, and I say it again: Surrender thyself, deny thyself, so shalt thou taste great peace of mind. Give all for all; take nothing away; demand nothing again; cleave to me alone, and I will be thine. And thy heart shall be free, and darkness shall no longer overpower thee."

After a while the reader closed the book again, for the patient needed rest. But the day afterward she again began.

Count Bernhard's outburst of temper had been a powerful means of hastening on the change in his heart. Had he not, contrary to his custom, given way to such rude passion, he would perhaps not have put up with so much persistence. But he was now ashamed of his precipitancy, and in order in some degree to make amends for it, he resolved this time to have patience. After this reading followed another, and then again another, day after day. Not one day did Mora from Östanlid leave him to his former thoughts. His first disgust for the monk's sermon, as he called it, began by degrees to give way. He now admitted that there was something good in it, although "to an intolerable excess." Against his will, a whole new world of ideas and renunciations opened before him, of which he had never had any suspicion, and the indescribable feeling of God's presence, never before experienced, worked to a surprising depth in the abysses of his soul, now with an overwhelming repentance and humiliation, and now with a foretaste of comfort which resembled the beneficent coolness of a sweet summer-wind over his broken, peaceless, anxious conscience.

One day, while Mora from Östanlid sat as usual silently behind the screen, the old count came back.

"I have good news," said he, with brightened forehead. "Paul is living and is recovered from his wound. He has written to me, and I have visited him at his abode with a court-huntsman by the name of Grenman. As soon as he gets permission to go out,

he will visit you, in case he will be received. He has himself requested it."

"He will be welcome. There is noble blood flowing in his veins," replied Bernhard, touched against his will.

"Yes," said the count, seriously, "a nobler blood than mine and yours, and that is *his mother's*."

Bernhard was silent. That was the hardest of all the hard nuts that grew among the thorns in his soul.

"Father," said he, half evasively, "I remember that my step-mother once used to read aloud to you. What books were they?"

"Oftenest the Bible. Sometimes also Tessin's letter to Gustaf III as a prince, or other learned secular books. But next to the Bible she liked best to read Johan Arndt and Thomas à Kempis."

"What do you think of Thomas à Kempis? Is he not too strict?"

"He demands only what all Christian teachers demand—the perfect renunciation and devotion of the heart to God."

"But you see that is impossible. A man cannot cast away from him his whole former life, and like a new-born babe begin a new existence."

"Not by his own strength. But with God nothing is impossible. Why do you ask that?"

"Because,—only do not laugh, it is nervousness arising from my sickness,—that Finnish witch, you know, often reads to me out of the old monk's book. It makes me very whimsical, yes, superstitious. It seems to me sometimes as though I was the greatest criminal on earth, and that unknown powers had sent an angel from heaven to lead me into a better path. It must be from the sickness. Do you not think, father, it is ridiculous of an aforetime philosopher and ambassador to Madrid?"

"If anything is ridiculous," replied Count Charles Victor Bertelsköld, with dignified seriousness, "it is

the pretension of our time to wish to pull down the omnipotent God from his eternal throne, and disintegrate Christianity into dry moral rules. That was not our father's way of thinking. When I was a child, my mother often used to tell me how my deceased father, according to his great king's example, never went out on any of his numerous campaigns without continually carrying his Bible with him, and daily reading in it. I myself have served under Prince Eugène, and have seen many do in the same way. Never yet has the shield of a nobleman been stained by a knowledge of the word of the living God, but many a time by the opposite."

Count Bernhard was silent, but the hidden seed in his heart was beginning to grow. When his father had gone away, he called Mora from Östanlid.

"Woman," said he, suddenly, "I want to see your face."

She was frightened and stepped back. "You cannot, my lord," she replied. "A promise . . . ."

"Listen," continued the count. "I am ashamed to admit it, but I am sometimes susceptible to fancies, credulous, superstitious, or whatever you choose to call them. Who are you? What do you wish of me? I do not know you; you look to be a poor peasant-woman, but there is something about you which contradicts your costume."

"If your grace questions me any more, I will go away."

"No, stay! Next to my mother, whom I scarcely remember, you are the only woman in the world whom I have ever highly esteemed. You are not what you say you are. If there are good spirits which protect mankind, you must be my protecting angel. Uncover your face; I am not worthy to behold a being of higher origin, but it would do me good. I might learn to believe."

"Believe in God and not in human beings! I am

no angel, I am what I seem, a poor woman, full of weakness and want. On the day when you prove by deed, and not by word alone that the grace of God has found entrance into your heart, then, but not before, I will uncover my face. You are now out of all danger, and can spare me, so I will leave you. But if you like, I will sometimes return to read to you."

"No, do not leave me! You have shown me the greatest kindness one mortal can show another. You have restored me, body and soul."

"Farewell. I shall come back. . . . It is time for me to go, for he already suspects too much," thought Mora from Östanlid as she departed.

CHAPTER VII.

TWO WOMEN'S LOVE.

ONE evening Paul Bertelsköld was sitting at the window in the little hunting-lodge, looking, with longing eyes, out toward the first brightening verdure of spring. It was nearly two weeks since his mother had left him. She had daily written to him, and received answers as to his health, but she had forbidden his revealing her presence to his father. The count, however, had accidently met Grenman, who had not had the heart to conceal from him the son's place of abode. Paul again met his father with feelings of affection in his warm heart; it was not his fault that half the secret was disclosed. He had obeyed his mother's wish, for to him there was nothing on earth so sacred as his mother's request.

Little by little his health had improved, and he had been allowed to open his window when the noon-day sun shone warm on the panes. But now it was evening,

the air was cool, and yet Paul had forgotten to shut his window. He saw the shadows of the tree-trunks grow longer and longer across the still tender velvety turf, and in the west the sun went down behind the remote indistinct roofs of Sweden's metropolis.

In its place rose the full moon, illuminating the idyllic picture which lay extended before Paul's window, and of which Bellman had not yet sung how

> "The Brunswick's billows bright
> Reflect their liquid light."

Paul watched the glittering pillar of moonlight on the newly liberated bay. Very lonely and silent and sad, and yet sweet and cheery was it here. There was a presage of spring, that in fleeting necken-dances played across the shining watery mirror. Who gathered those runes into speech, and read those glistening, silver-twinkling, soundless words?

Paul was a dreamer who always read something beneath the surface of things. It seemed to him that he was close to the heart of nature. He understood her silent speech. He was sorrowful and glad, like the moonlight this evening. In the glitter of the waves he read his whole life.

At one time the pillar of moonlight in the sea was darkened, and a slight shadow seemed to glide across it. Then the shadow disappeared, and everything was again as before. Was it a boat on the bay, or was it the necken's daughter, leaping for a moment up into the glitter of the waves?

Soon afterward two forms were seen as though ascending out of the sea, and approaching the hunter's lodge. Now they were concealed by the trees, now they again glided forth in the moonlight, and Paul saw that they were two women. They were probably the ones who had had themselves rowed across the bay in a boat.

When they had come nearer, one of them said to the other: "It is here!" and that one remained standing as though on guard, while the other went forward to the open window.

"Is that you, Count Bertelsköld?" asked a not unknown voice, in French, and the voice perceptibly trembled.

The uncertain moonlight fell on Marchioness Egmont's charming face, and in spite of the blush which suddenly suffused her cheeks with crimson, she seemed, in that light, as pale as a ghost.

"You here, my lady!" exclaimed Paul, greatly astonished at this unexpected vision.

"Oh, how I have sought you, how I have sought you for four long weeks!" continued the animated French woman, in a low voice. "I ought to hate you, yes, abhor you, ungrateful creature, for leaving me so long without a line about your life or dwelling-place! But there is not time for that now. I have a matter of the greatest importance to confide to you, and I am glad I have not arrived too late. To-night, for the first time, I have succeeded in finding your place of refuge, and I would not lose a single minute."

"How good you are, madame!" replied Paul, with his easily moved heart.

"Is there no place where we can talk without witnesses? These shadows terrify me, and I fear some one is hidden behind the trunks of the trees," continued the marchioness, with a timid look at the half-obscure park.

"If you will come into my little room," said Paul, embarrassed and blushing, for he was not prepared for such a visit.

"Yes, yes, show me the way in!" whispered the beautiful French woman, with a gesture of haste and anxiety.

Paul showed her the stairs, and immediately afterward received her in his chamber.

"What do you think of me?" said the marchioness, as wearied out, she sunk down on a plain wooden chair.

"My lady . . . ."

"Yes, you with your rigid manners and your propriety, what do you think of a person who at this time and in this manner intrudes into your presence?"

"I am grateful for it," innocently replied Paul.

"Oh, I beg you understand me rightly! Be assured that only the most important reasons could have induced me . . . . But it is all the same. You are not heartless like other men. You are the only one to whom I can speak in full confidence. Your rescued life is again in danger, my lord!"

"Oh, madame, my wound is healed . . . ."

"Understand me rightly. I paid thirty of the best detectives of the police to find you, and they led me on a false track to Upsala. I went thither . . . ."

"For my sake!"

"I wanted to see the celebrated Linnæus. When I came back I found out that a Spanish *valet* of your brother knew your place of abode, and had let threats against you escape him. I had him further examined, and scarcely an hour ago found out that every night he lay in wait in the park at Brunswick, armed, and with the design of killing you. Not a moment was to be lost. I sent out people to watch the park, and myself hastened to inform you of the danger. It is the hatred of your brother, which, having failed of a victim, wants to make amends for its carelessness."

"No, that is impossible. My brother lies more dangerously wounded than myself, and my father told me he had changed his principles."

"Your father may have been mistaken, and a wounded enemy can make use of a well arm. You are not safe a moment, and so you must immediately go away from here with me."

"Pardon me, I cannot do that."

"Why not?"

"It would be cowardly to fly from a perhaps imagined danger, and I do not wish to wound the honest huntsman who has given me an asylum with him."

The marchioness arose, threw off her velvet cloak, and sat down by the window, where the moonlight fell on her pale face, and was strangely reflected in her small and sparkling brown eyes.

"You cannot?" she repeated. "Well, then I will remain with you."

"Madame!"—stammered Paul in amazement.

"And you think, you ingrate, that I would leave you, and lose you again, perhaps forever! Do you not then guess what I have suffered during those eternally long weeks, when I did not know whether you were living or buried? And you believe that I will once more be slowly tortured to death, in order that the honest huntsman may not be lonesome for you, or for fear some one may upbraid you with having fled from an assassin! Oh, my lord . . . . the moonlight is very fine this evening!"

"You will be missed . . . ."

"You are not badly situated, you have a very fine view. Superb poplars over there. Do not incommode yourself, I beg you; I shall thrive very well."

Paul was conscious of something within him which resembled one-third anger, one-third trembling, and the rest enchantment.

"No," said he; "I would be the most ungrateful being on earth if I permitted you to expose yourself so for my sake."

"Then will you go with me?"

"No, my lady, your reputation . . . ."

"What of that? What do I care for my reputation? What is a reputation? A lie. But I disdain lies, my lord. Oh, there are beautiful things already told about me! Let them tell a fable more; it is indifferent to me. You will not go with me, and I will not leave you, so

I shall remain here in this seat till to-morrow morning. What shall we converse about? What do you think, for instance, about Stockholm? A good deal of ice—or what is your opinion?"

"Herminie!" exclaimed Paul, beside himself, and seizing her hand.

"It is said that you have a kind of sunshine in the summer. Your moon is detestably melancholy. It makes us all as pale as ghosts. If it were not for those black curls, you would look like a marble statue. If you will permit, I will arrange them *à l'antique*. I will imagine that we are ghosts from past centuries, who have returned to earth to visit the favorite places of yore. Who did we use to be when we lived on earth? I was—let's see! Cecilia Wasa. And you, who were you? The Count of Hoya. Oh, how beautiful it is to be dead, when one has company in the grave!"

Paul kissed the delicate snow-white hand. The moon shone on his black hair, and the poplars outside rustled in the night wind.

"It must be sweet to love after death, especially if one has never found love in life," whispered the beautiful French woman, in dreaming sadness.

"Who would not love you, Herminie! Who would not gladly die to make you happy!"

"But live, Paul! Then is there no one, no one in the wide world who will live for me?"

And her handsome curly head sunk against his breast.

Then the door softly opened, and with silent step a woman in peasant costume entered. Unobserved she advanced to the kneeling youth, who was pressing to his lips the left hand of Marchioness Egmont, which she did not withdraw, while the right lay on his shoulder, and her lustrous eyes seemed utterly absorbed in the contemplation of him.

A cloud passed over the moon, and it was almost dark in the room. Mora from Östanlid, for it was she,

laid her hand softly on the young man's head and whispered, "Paul!"

Paul and the marchioness both sprung up at once. If the shadow had not been so dense, the cheeks of both might have been seen to suffuse with a glowing crimson.

But with the marchioness the impression followed the word as quickly as the report after the flash. Instantly the demon of jealousy gained the ascendancy over her, and with a dagger point in every word she said:

"Do you not hear, my lord? Your sweetheart spoke your name. I now understand why you cannot go with me."

The room grew light; Mora from Östanlid had uncovered a dark-lantern, which she had held concealed, and lighted a lamp.

"Marchioness Egmont," said Paul, "I have the honor of presenting my mother, Countess Bertelsköld. Mother, I entreat your friendship for this noble, estimable lady, who has come hither to protect me against a feared secret assault."

"I thank you, madame, for your kindness to my son!" said the countess, with calm dignity, extending her hand. "Your fears were well grounded: José the *valet* has just been arrested by your people not far from here. Your visit has perhaps saved Paul's life, and it was beautiful, it was magnanimous of you. *I* cannot misunderstand you, madame!"

Marchioness Egmont knew how to value the subtle delicacy of those words. She pressed the hand of her supposed rival, and, with an embarrassment which became her indescribably, said:

"I thank you that you have understood me rightly, and by your words I would have known you without presentation. I am very happy in having made your acquaintance, madame, and since you are here, I have no longer any reason to tremble for Count Paul. I

yield the charge of his welfare into the best of hands, and who have also the best right to it. Farewell, my dear countess ; farewell, lord count ! *Au revoir !*"

"Farewell, marchioness ! . . . . I came just in time !" thought Mora from Östanlid.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TEMPTER IN THE WILDERNESS.

OUTSIDE the entrance to the Great Church at Stockholm, stood, one Sunday forenoon, an elderly man in long brown coat, and with a broad-brimmed hat pulled down over his forehead. For a long time he had stood there in the same position ; the bells rung, the organ and psalms sounded solemnly within, but to these the man in brown seemed to be perfectly indifferent. He did not move from the place ; he scarcely seemed to observe the several hundred who went past him. He looked only at the crotch of his massive staff, and the church-goers cast suspicious glances at him, thinking he was not exactly in his right mind.

But in the crotch of his staff there was a very small box encased, and in this box was a compass, which the man in the brown coat attentively observed every time any one went by.

"Yesterday it pointed north-east, and to-day it points almost straight down, but without the least motion !" muttered the man to himself.

The service closed, and the people began to pour out of church. Suddenly a slight trembling was observed in the needle, but it immediately ceased. A peasant was walking past. The man in brown looked up and said : "He has had it, but he has it no longer."

The peasant, however, became aware of his presence, and turned around. It was Jonas Bertila.

"Good day, Doctor Weis!" said he. "Or rather, I bid you good day. Do you know, doctor, that my poor uncle, the old Larsson, was yesterday taken to the mad house, and you are the one that made him crazy? I advise you to make him rational again, or else I may testify something about you which before night might put you into the Rose Chamber."

"I will make your uncle as rational as he can become, if you will tell to whom you have given his ring," replied the doctor.

"What ring?"

"The one you found in the barber-shop, and afterward gave away."

"Oh! that one?" replied Jonas, with his shrewd face. "I sold that for two-pence to a copper-smith at Gråmunkegränd."

The doctor shook his head. "You have heard too much," he said, "to sell such a jewel for two-pence. Tell me to whom you have given it, and fix your own price!"

"The price is your beard, you arrant knave!" was the reply. "If you do not pack yourself off by to-night I shall get you lodgings at the White Horse."*

"I thank you," calmly replied the doctor. "If I were inclined to revenge, I should give you a different kind of lodgings. But you can go. You are a reptile like all the others."

With these words, the man in brown again placed himself by the church door. But scarcely had he cast a glance at the compass before he was seen to change color, for the needle was in the most violent motion.

"Who? Who?" murmured the doctor, who seemed wishing to devour the out-streaming crowd with his eyes.

*Like the Rose Chamber, a room where prisoners were tortured to confession.

Forty persons at least were passing him at the same time. He followed this crowd of people, saw it divide at the nearest street, and consulted the compass for every step. The needle, with undiminished motion, pointed down toward the palace, and then toward the wharf. The man in brown followed in the same direction. At the wharf lay then, as still in our days, kull-boats for the convenience of those who who wished to cross over the river to Kastellholm, Ladugårdsland, or the Zoölogical Garden. Several of the boats were now filled with church people. The man in brown went along with them.

In his boat there were, besides himself, two men and three women as passengers. The boat lay to at several landing places, and one by one the passengers went ashore. At last only a peasant-woman remained, and she ordered herself taken across to the Zoölogical Garden. But the man in brown who had watched the direction of the needle had remained with her to the last, and walked with her up the steps of the landing at the so-called Allmänna Lane.

The woman left the wharf and the boatman's building-grounds to the right, went past Hassel hill, and turned off to the left on a narrow foot-path, which led through the wild lonely park directly to Brunswick.

"Northeast, that is right!" said the man in brown to himself, as he followed her.

When they had advanced so far between the hills and the close tree-trunks that all view of the town was lost, and no living being was seen near them except the thrushes and bullfinches in the half-leaved tree-tops, the man quickened his pace, and soon found himself at the side of the wayfaring woman.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"To my goal," replied the woman, not particularly pleased with the unexpected company.

"Rightly answered," responded the brown-clad man. "We mortals know not whence we come or

whither we go, but one goal have we all,——the grave. Is it thither you are going?"

"Yes, but not to remain there."

"There are some, however, who claim that the atom is lost in the infinite."

"They greatly err."

"She betrays herself; she is no peasant-woman. Very well," thought the man in brown to himself, and afterward continued aloud:

"My friend, you are not what you seem to be. You do not speak like a peasant woman."

"How do I speak?"

"You are a person of birth and education. You go disguised on secret business."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it. Your gait, your voice, your speech, all contradict your costume."

"Think what you please."

"I am sorry, but I belong to the secret police, and am compelled to arrest you, if you cannot give me a convincing proof that you are on legitimate business. Swear that you are a peasant woman, and I will believe that I have been mistaken."

The woman looked at him a moment in affright, but hastened her gait and did not reply.

The man in brown looked around him. All was silent and lonely in the park. Then he seized the woman by the arm and threateningly said:

"If you have such a bad conscience that you cannot even swear to your innocence, you must go with me to the police. They have proper means there to get the truth out. What do you say to a pair of thumb-screws, for instance? But I will have compassion on you. Only swear that you are the one your dress indicates, and not disguised, then I will let you, unhindered, continue your way."

"I am Countess Bertelsköld, and command you to let go my arm!" said the woman, as she threw back

her head-cloth, and looked fearlessly at him with her large dark eyes.

But the brown-clad man was here struggling for the supreme desire of his life, and was not disposed to release his sure booty.

"So it is you," said he, "who have been advertised in the papers for having run away from your husband? So much the more reason have I to take you to the police, whence you will probably have to go directly to the house of correction."

The woman colored deeply, but kept silence. For this insult she had no reply. "Oh, Bernhard, Bernhard!" thought she.

"You thus perceive," continued the pretended policeman, "that it depends altogether upon me whether all the street boys of Stockholm shall soon be pointing their finger at you. There is only one single means for you to escape the danger. Give me the king's ring, and you are free!"

"You are no policeman; you are a robber!" exclaimed the woman, as she tried to pull herself loose. But the hand of the brown-clad man held her back as in a vise.

"Perhaps I have been mistaken," said he, again yielding. "If you have not the ring you need only swear to that, and I will believe you."

"You well know that I carry the miserable talisman with me," replied the woman, disdainfully; "otherwise you would not, time and again, have tried to entice it from me by perjury. But as you know its power, you ought also to know that all your threats are impotent as opposed to it. You will neither be able to kill me nor rob me. You will only draw destruction upon yourself."

"Grace! Grace!" now exclaimed the man in brown, as he suddenly let go her arm and threw himself upon his knees. "You are right; you are under the protection of the planets, and I cannot steal your

treasure from you so long as you do not yourself forfeit the possession of it. But have pity on me! I am a man who has searched into all the secrets of nature, except this single and greatest one which remains to me. In order to find it, I have searched through lands and seas, yes, I have sacrificed half of my life. I cannot live without that jewel; its mere existence frustrates all my endeavors, so long as I am not the one who owns and wears it. Have the goodness, then, to give me the ring, and I will be your slave, your dog; I will overwhelm you with fortune and gold; for you I will storm the very gates of heaven."

"If I should give you the ring," replied the peasant-woman, "I should violate the first commandment in God's law, and have your soul on my conscience. But this ring has already caused enough evil in the world. Therefore no one shall ever again wear it, not even the one to whom by right of inheritance it belongs. I will burn it up in fire, since no water will put it out of the way."

With these words, she had unconsciously loosened the ring from her finger, and the man in brown caught sight of it. Instantly he threw himself furiously upon her, to snatch the treasure, and he would probably have succeeded if she had not at the same moment thrown the dangerous jewel as far as she could into the park.

The man in brown released her immediately, and precipitately seized his staff to consult the compass, and by its help to look for his treasure in the young grass. This motion was misunderstood by a man who, with rapid steps, was just then approaching on the foot-path. He threw himself upon the man in brown, wrenched the staff from his hand, and broke the crotch in pieces against the nearest stone, so that the fragments of the little box were scattered around on the ground.

Once more it was Jonas Bertila.

"Alas! my star-compass! All is lost!" groaned the brown-clad man, as he sunk down annihilated on the sod.

"It was well that I noticed that villain at the Great Church, and saw him follow you," said Jonas to the woman. "'Look sharp, Monsieur Fox,' thought I to myself, 'there is nothing good in your mind.' And then I followed you in another boat, but that lay to at the wharf, and then I altogether lost sight of you until I heard your voice, and saw that brown villain raise the stick. Do you want me to give him a good drubbing? He ought to have a lathering for uncle's sake, and a *douche* for yours."

"Do not touch him! With him something great lies in the dust," said the woman, seriously.

"Great? Yes, if you mean great rascality you are quite right. What else great can there be lying in the grass?"

"Yes," said the woman, "there lies a lofty but broken fragment of human genius. There lies investigation without God!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIRST TRIAL.

"PRETTY well done—you begin to look fine now, dear mother," said Cederberg, the hair-dresser and court face-painter, to a peasant woman who had presented herself to solicit his assistance. Cederberg had learned his art in Paris, and had received an appointment at the theater in the time of the late king. No one understood better than he how to re-create people, and under his skillful hand the tall and still-blooming woman, with her black hair, and her beautiful expressive face, had been transformed to an octogenarian

sibyl, with thin snow-white hair, furrowed brow, and sunken cheeks.

"Now your good man will open his eyes when you come to read the fortune in his palm on his name's-day, and if he recognizes you by the firelight you may call me a candy-painter. But do not blame me that I have painted you thirty years older instead of thirty years younger. With such eyes and teeth I could just as well have made you into a girl of twenty. I advise you, dear mother, to be counting the boards in the floor when you try to fool the old man, for if dear father gets sight of those lanterns in the head of an eighty-year-old fortune-teller, he will laugh at me and all my art."

"What are your charges?" asked the woman, as with visible reluctance she saw herself in the glass.

"Nine dollars for the painting, and nine for the use of the false hair. That is a shamefully low price for thirty years on your shoulders."

The new octogenarian paid him, enveloped her head in her head-cloth, and went out, but not, as the court face-painter believed, to her old man in Rospigg's quarter in the southern suburb, but northward to Drottning Street. She there entered a large house, under her assumed name of Mora from Östanlid.

Evening was approaching, and Count Bernhard Bertelsköld sat by his writing-table contemplating a paper which lay before him. He was now almost restored; moreover, the wounded eye could again be used, and only a deep scar above the left temple disfigured his handsome forehead. But the former mocking smile had altogether disappeared from his lips; he was pale and serious, and it was evident that he had fought out hard battles with the demoniac powers within him.

"It was well that you came, Mora," said he. "I need to strengthen myself with the presence of my

protecting spirit. Here is my application for discharge from all my places at court and in diplomacy."

"Have you reflected well?" asked the faithful nurse, in a low voice.

"I have not thought of anything else for the past week," he replied. "You can imagine that it requires a hard struggle to pull one's self up by the roots from his whole past life, to begin a new one. A hundred times I have tried to think out a middle way, where I might at the same time serve old and new gods. But it will not do, Mora; it will not do! My former acquaintances have again visited me and jested over my scruples. I should not in the long run hold out against them; I should be ashamed in their presence, and again become the same that I once was. Only see how weak I have grown, Mora, I who thought myself born a giant! And, therefore, I am now going to draw a large black mark across all the past, move somewhere into the country, and devote myself wholly to agriculture. Do you approve of my resolve?"

"You will be called a dreamer, a crack-brained religious fanatic."

"I know it. But if I do not heed it, but adhere to God and my conscience, will I then do right?"

"You will do right in that."

"I am glad that you are of the same opinion. But you know, Mora, that I have heavy troubles, and much for which to make amends. That political entanglement and the marchioness I can make right. It is not so dangerous with Paul either; he is young, he can forgive, and I expect him to call on me this evening. But my step-mother, you see, my step-mother,—she can never forgive me."

"Do you think her so cruel and revengeful?"

"No, but reflect how angry I have made her, how mortally I have insulted her! I have driven her away from home, husband, and child; I have disgraced her privately and publicly, disgraced her in the newspa-

pers before all Sweden. Why, she would be more than human if she could pardon me such atrocious injuries."

"Try!"

"How try? Why, she is not to be found. No one knows where she is,—at least I have no suspicion of it. I will acknowledge to you, Mora, that there have been moments when I imagined you might be she. There is something in your voice and form which is suggestive of my step-mother. But the next moment I laughed at my foolish fancy. No, the limit of pardon I can hope from my step-mother is, that she will not curse me. I can never expect that she will be able to endure the sight of me, and, therefore, I have made up my mind to buy me an estate in Finland, in order to leave her undisturbed at Falkby. She will feel safer when there is a sea between us."

"I approve of your purpose, but the manner you should leave to God and the future. Do you want me to read a little for you?"

"Do so. I need light, for I am groping in great darkness."

And again she read, from the book rich in comfort, of the highest good, of peace and reconciliation, self-denial and perfect devotion to God, besides which no firm foundation is to be found in this world. While she was still reading, the counts Bertelsköld, father and son, were announced.

"Behold," said Mora from Östanlid, as she withdrew behind her screen, "your first trial is now approaching. Love is knocking at your closed door, and it rests with you to open or bolt it."

Scarcely had she pronounced these words before Paul entered, and with rapid steps walked toward his brother, as though without reflection to throw himself into Bernhard's arms. But so strong was the impression of that pale, thin figure at the writing-table, and of the fear, the repugnance that Paul, ever since child-

hood, had felt for his elder brother, that he paused motionless and hesitated in the middle of the floor.

Bernhard observed this, and, rising, went a few steps to meet Paul. But on him also did the memory of his mortal hatred produce such a powerful effect that the hand already extended sunk again, and, hesitating and motionless as his brother, he paused before Paul.

Two proud torrents were they, which were to mingle their surging billows; two raging storms which were to meet and go in the same direction. The moment was decisive: a precipitate word, a doubtful look, and all might be lost. No one as yet knew with certainty whether the two would recognize each other as brothers, or turn away from each other as mortal enemies.

Then the old count, their father, went to them and said earnestly: "Bernhard Bertelsköld, there stands your brother Paul! Paul Bertelsköld, there stands your brother Bernhard! What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

No more was needed to melt the ice in the hearts of the brothers. Indeed, it had long before been undermined by a warm sunshine which had illuminated them both. Now the two at the same time opened their arms, and the next instant they were clasped in each other's embrace.

Then the father's arms encircled them. "I am not ashamed to weep," said the gray-haired nobleman, "when the very angels of heaven must weep with joy."

And the fourth? — She sat silent, unknown and hidden, like one of those invisible angels who bear witness of the victories of eternal love on earth; but her joy was the humblest, and, therefore, the purest of all.

Her time was not yet come.

"And now," said Paul, with a resolute face, as he

laughingly wiped the pearls clear as dew from his handsome, dark eyes, "now everything shall again be well, now we will share with each other all the delight and sorrow of life, and our new alliance shall be sealed by . . . ."

He interrupted himself with an embarrassed look. He did not yet know what he ventured to think of his brother.

". . . . By our mother!" said Bernhard, promptly.

That was the first time Paul had heard him say *our* mother. "I thank you," said he, with a warm pressure of the hand.

"And I bless you, my son, for the greatest victory a mortal can win—victory over self."

"Father," rejoined Paul, no longer able to restrain the flood of his emotions, "I cannot tell you all, but I know that during the absence of our mother she has not been indifferent to our weal, and I hope our reconciliation shall restore her to us."

"That is also the hope which has sustained me under all my afflictions," said the old count; "and I have ceased from all my searchings, in order that her return may depend on her own choice."

"What if I have guessed rightly!" said Bernhard, musing. "What if my foolish presentiment has not deceived me! The joy of the reunion is perhaps nearer than we think. Mora from Östanlid, I have something to request of you."

She stepped tremblingly forth.

"Do you remember what you promised me? When, not only by word, but also by deed, I proved myself not the same as before, you promised to reveal to me the face of my protecting angel. Do you regard me now as having fulfilled the conditions you proposed?"

"You have begun," she whispered.

"Then it devolves upon you to fulfill your promise to me."

The room was dimly lighted by the single lamp on the writing table, for Bernhard's eye could not yet

bear a stronger light. Mora from Östanlid advanced in the half obscurity, and unwound the cloth she wore around her head. Paul trembled, for he recognized the garb; Bernhard trembled with upbraidings of conscience, and the old count regarded the scene with mute surprise.

But when the head-cloth was removed, all saw beneath it the form of an old woman of eighty, with snow-white hair, furrowed brow, withered cheeks and downcast eyes.

The expectation of all was defeated, and the fleeting hope changed to dejection. "What a fool I am to think myself worthy of seeing her again!" exclaimed Bernhard Bertelsköld. "But whoever you may be, unknown, mysterious being, my gratitude and admiration belong to you for my whole life!"

The octogenarian did not reply. She made haste to conceal her face again, and with a thorn in her heart hurried out.

"What have I done?" she moaned. "May God forgive me, for it must have been a sin; the still, small voice within me plainly tells me so. Thou knowest, my God, that I did it with a good intent, for Bernhard still stands hesitating at the gates of the kingdom. But I have deceived my best beloved—oh, it was a terrible moment! I am not born to deceive . . . . "

CHAPTER X.

THE CONSPIRATOR AND THE PRIVATE SECRETARY.

"IT can be done, your majesty, it can be done!" said Colonel Jacob Magnus Sprengtport, one day in the middle of May, when he had a private evening audience with the king. "My brother is about

to go over to Finland to inaugurate the business, and awhile afterward I will follow him. The officers of the garrison of Sveaborg are most of them Hats, and consequently discontented and ready for any change whatever. Through them I believe myself able to incite the garrison, and when the business is once in motion I believe I can also answer for the light dragoons at Borgå."

"Do you think it so easy to incite the Finns?" asked the king. "I have heard that that nation is obstinate in everything, even in its fidelity."

"For that very reason, your majesty. If there is any nation more devoted to royalty than are the Swedes themselves, it is those Finnish bears over there. To be unfaithful to the form of government is at the present time the same as being faithful to the king. And if a little intrigue would be of service, there are means of getting the people also in motion. Councilor Reuterholm knows that best. He has performed a miracle, he has instigated my well-behaved and sleepy inspector-general in Gammelbacka to institute proceedings against me before the estates, and he has succeeded so well that unless your majesty will deign to accept a more powerful crown I am ruined. You there see," artfully added the colonel, "why I am obliged to be a royalist, from mere desperation, if I were not from conviction, and why your majesty can depend on me as the hilt on the blade."

"And afterward your idea is . . . . "

"Afterward my idea is to bring the trustworthy troops across on some vessels of the navy which are lying at Sveaborg. Some fine evening the Finns will come ashore at Erstavik near. I have my outposts, the vessels are signaled, a multitude of representatives and officers who can be depended upon hasten to meet the Finns . . . . "

"But you see that would be *à tout prix* throwing ourselves into the arms of the Finns! No, my dear

baron, my Swedish troops would look upon that as a lack of confidence."

"The Finns, your majesty, are only made to be used as wedges, which are driven in to split knots, and afterward it is the ax which completes the work. The real *coup de main*, therefore, ought to be reserved to the Swedish troops. The garrison of Stockholm will be carefully informed, and will march in the night to meet the Finns."

"But the nights are light."

"That cursed light—I beg pardon—brings about nothing but confusion. But fortunately there is no one but Pechlin who has eyes in his head, and we will discover some plan of managing him. The others are not dangerous, they draw the nightcap over the ears down to the very nose."

"Go on!"

"After the garrison has made common cause with the Finns, the meal is served, and your majesty is most humbly invited to the table. That is to say, your majesty will have the grace to appear at the landing and harangue the troops, in order afterward at their head to march into the metropolis. Here your majesty places himself at the head of the guard. The council and the leaders of the Caps are arrested, the estates are called by heralds to the assembly-room, and a new form of government is presented for their ratification. It will go off like a comedy. The end will be what is right—a marriage between the power and the crown, and the spectators will applaud."

"But, my dear baron, such comedies sometimes end in tragedies. As a child I have been witness to them."

"Oh, your majesty, it depends only on the actors not breaking down, and we must look out for a capable prompter. For the rest, it is not my plan to stake everything on one card. We must assure ourselves of some of the southern fortresses, for instance Christian-

stad. In order to suppress that criminal insurrection, your majesty draws together an army, and a king at the head of an army has a marvelous power to convince the people of their patriotic principles."

King Gustaf's large blue eyes rested with a peculiar expression of prudent caution on the bold intriguer. He had not yet consented to anything, not yet had he laid his crown and his fame in the hands of a subject.

"I will think of your proposal," said he.

"Pardon, sire, while the gardener sleeps the weeds grow. While your majesty is thinking, there are others who are acting. Now or never!"

"And who will warrant that you will not plunge the kingdom into civil war, and draw disaster upon yourself and my most faithful adherents?"

"Who? Cæsar's luck and money, your majesty. I need a great deal of money."

"Well, my dear baron, will you lend me a hundred ducats on my honest face?"

"A hundred thousand, your majesty, if I had them. But in revolutions, as in war, the first condition is money, the second is money, and the third once more money. It must be procured, even if we are obliged to coin moonlight. Has not your majesty some sorcerer who can do that? I have heard that Frenchmen, like Finns, understand witchcraft."

"*Voyons.* I will try an incantation."

"So your majesty consents?"

"To what?"

"To my humble proposal."

King Gustaf smiled. "I consent," said he, "not to follow the example of your inspector-general, and institute proceedings against you before the estates. For the rest, you can be assured of my royal favor."

"And authority?"

"Oh, yes, to go to Finland and buy horses for the artillery."

"I most humbly thank you, and shall place myself under the direction of your majesty's gracious will."

The audience was ended.

"He is as ambitious as his mother, and as timid as his father, but I am going to send him before me as out of a cannon," thought Sprengtport, as he withdrew.

"He is a fuse leading to the powder magazine, but we must look out that everything is not blown up," thought the king, as he dismissed his bold and dangerous subject.

He touched the bell, and the adjutant on duty appeared.

"Call hither the young man who is awaiting audience."

Shortly afterward Paul Bertelsköld, still pale from his wound, entered.

"Your name is Bertelsköld, son of the count at Falkby?'

"Yes, your majesty."

"Student?"

Paul bowed assent.

"What have you studied?"

"Natural sciences, history, and geography."

"Then you have probably not studied any language but your mother-tongue?"

"Some, your majesty."

"What ones?"

"French, German, English, Italian, and Russian."

"*En effet*, that is really 'some.' How did you hit upon the idea of studying Russian?"

"In Åbo, I made the acquaintance of a Russian deserter."

"Very well. Here is a diploma of a Russian order which has been sent to me. Translate it for me."

Paul did so without faltering.

"That is good," said the king, smiling. "I have been told that you have uncommon acquirements, and I have not called you hither to undergo an examination. Are you discreet?"

"If your majesty will be pleased to try me, I will not be found unworthy of my name."

"Oh, there are many kinds of noblemen . . . . your brother, for instance. But can you keep secrets on which your head depends, and more than that?"

"I can go to the death for what I regard as right."

The king eyed him sharply. "And if you do not regard a thing as right, what do you do then?"

"I resign a confidence which I cannot answer."

"How? You are rather positive, my young sir!"

"I cannot compromise my conscience, but neither can I betray the confidence of my king or of any one else."

"My friend, in the service of the king, people do not reflect. They do not reason, they obey."

"Pardon, your majesty! I cannot serve on other terms."

"*Au diable!* What do you expect me to do with such officials? Go away! You can be a spread-eagle speech-maker at the diet, like the others; but you will not do for my service."

Paul bowed, and was about to depart.

"Stay!" said the king, with wrinkled brows. "You are acquainted with Russian, and that might perhaps be of use. Do you know you have been recommended to succeed Gyllengham as my private secretary, as I cannot make use of him?"

"I no longer ventured to hope that."

"Well, why in heaven's name are you then throwing away your good fortune by uttering one *sottise* after another to me?"

"I shall never tell your majesty anything but the truth."

"*Foi de gentilhomme*," said the easily appeased king,

laughing. "If you think of being such a prodigy at my court, I really have an inclination to try what you are fit for. But take care, young man, I warn you about the other *messieurs et mesdames de la cour.* At the very best they are going to scratch out your eyes. *Enfin*, to-morrow morning, at ten o'clock, you will present yourself before Count Scheffer to receive instructions, and afterwards we will have you in gracious remembrance."

Paul, believing the audience ended, was for the second time about to withdraw, but the king motioned him to remain.

"Something has occurred to me," said he. "Can you write your mother-tongue correctly?"

Paul assured him that he believed himself versed in that remarkable art, which, as everybody knew, was not the king's strong point.

"Well, I suppose you draw crow's-feet on the paper, like all young scholars? Write something. I want to see your hand-writing."

Paul picked up the pen on the king's table, and in a brilliant, beautiful chirography wrote a quotation from the Henriad:

"*La vérité seule est grande, la vertu seule est aimable.*" *

"H'm," said the king, evidently satisfied; "you shall begin your duties with a very important trust. You shall write out the *rôles* of Thetis and Pelée."

*Truth alone is great, virtue alone is lovely.

CHAPTER XI.

A GREAT ACTOR.

ONE morning, or rather noon, for it was nearly twelve o'clock, King Gustaf, in his blue silk dressing gown, was sitting at the writing-table, engaged in once more reading over a letter which he had drawn up during the previous sleepless night. A couple of hours of unquiet slumber in the morning had not been able to recall the color to his cheeks. He was pale and dejected, but the soft hand of his young wife was not permitted to smooth the wrinkles from his forehead. Dangers were accumulating at every point, and where was the power to be found strong enough to exorcise them! Here availed neither faith in fate, nor the maxims of Voltaire. Reality, like a threatening specter, confronted him; he knew that his enemies were negotiating for an alliance with Russia and England, and that alliance might be the grave of all his proud hopes, perhaps of himself. The moment in which to act had arrived, and yet action itself was a game of chance, in which everything was at stake.

The letter which the king, contrary to his custom, was so carefully reading through before it was to leave, was addressed in cipher to the King of France, and in obscure words contained a notification of an important change which must soon take place in Sweden, and for which the king begged the support of the friendship of France.

After a moment's silence, King Gustaf folded the paper, put it with unusual care into another envelope, sealed it with his own hand, and then gave it to his

private secretary, who had sat up with him all night to attend to the correspondence.

"To Count Creutz in Paris," said he.

The secretary took the envelope, and wrote the address upon it.

"Have you remembered all the titles of the count?" inquired the king.

"Yes, your majesty," replied Paul Bertelsköld.

"Very well. Is the courier ready?"

"He is waiting in the ante-room."

"See that he sets out immediately, and without speaking to any one."

"It shall be done, your majesty."

Wearied out, the king threw himself into an easy chair, and his usually animated countenance expressed a dejection which bordered upon despair. "One plank, one single plank on which I can safely step!" he moaned almost inaudibly.

It was announced that Baron Düben, president of the chancery, and a leader of the Caps, requested audience.

"My hair-dresser!" exclaimed the king quickly, for he had not yet made his morning toilet, and he could not possibly, in *déshabillé*, receive the president of the chancery.

The hair-dresser performed his business with dexterity, and the *valet* vied with him in activity. A delicate, almost imperceptible paint was applied to the pale cheeks, and before long the king, with beaming countenance, walked out into the audience room.

"It is a pleasure to me to see you, my dear baron," said he. "I hope you are well, and that our amiable neighbors, their majesties of Russia and Denmark, allow us to sleep in tranquillity. What do you suppose I dreamed about the empress last night?"

"Does your majesty entertain any apprehensions?" asked Baron Düben, anxiously. He was sent out by people more sagacious than himself, to sound the plans

of the king, and try to find out whether the majesty of the realm had any suspicious designs against liberty.

"Apprehensions? Ah, my dear baron, what do you think of me?" said the king, lightly. "I am a married man; do you think me in a condition to be jealous of Count Orloff? No, I will confide a matter to you, but which for the present will remain *entre nous*. What do you say to our sending her majesty our royal order of the Seraphim?"

"That would be one way of laying such a powerful neighbor under obligation to you," replied the president of the chancery, greatly calmed.

"Bound in chains,* that is also my opinion. But it is a matter which has caused me great perplexity. Suppose we really do send the chain of the Seraphim to a woman,—something unusual if not unprecedented,—then the question arises: how is her czarinian majesty to wear our badge? Is she to wear it with or without the costume of the order? What is your opinion? Is she to wear the chain on the neck alone, or over the shoulders and corsage? Would it not be advisable to get the opinion of the council on such an important question? For, to wear our principal order with *nonchalance* would be to compromise the dignity of the realm."

"Your majesty is perfectly right — that is a very important question," responded Baron Düben, very seriously, but secretly smiling at a king who was *naïve* enough to lie and dream about such things while others were grasping after his crown.

"*N'est ce pas?*" continued the king, greatly interested. "We must make ourselves accurately informed of the rules for the order of the garter and of the golden fleece. I cannot see why the empress could not accommodate her toilet in a suitable manner to resemble the costume of the order; and as a model, we could let

* Referring to the chain of the badge.

a cartoon accompany it in our colors. Her majesty will then have an opportunity to satisfy herself about our taste."

"Well, thank God, *there is no danger in that quarter!*" thought the president of the chancery, as he presently withdrew, after he had for appearance' sake referred to the king the confirmation of some unimportant nominations in the diplomatic corps.

When he had gone, the king gave orders not to admit any one. More than ever exhausted, he threw himself into an arm-chair, the muscles of his face relaxed, and he sunk into a gloomy meditation upon his unhappy situation.

"It may cost blood, much blood!" he whispered, and his tender heart shuddered for the consequences.

"But I must have audience, I have extremely important business to communicate!" was just then heard in an animated woman's voice in the ante-chamber, and the king recognized the voice of Marchioness Egmont.

"The marchioness will have audience," said the king to the *valet*, who was entering, in embarrassment.

And when the lovely French woman came dancing in, as lightly and capriciously as though she had been at home here, she found the king, as the president had found him, radiant with all the charms of youth and grace, with sunshine on his smooth forehead, and playful merriment in his large, handsome eyes.

"Be pleased, your majesty, to pardon my boldness," said the marchioness, as unconcernedly as if she had stepped on the foot of a cadet. "I do not come without important reasons."

"A visit from you, madame, is of itself an extremely important reason," replied the king, with his complaisant smile, and yet not without a needle-point in the reply, for he was extremely sensitive about his royal dignity.

"Is there anything besides which has given me the pleasure of seeing you?"

The marchioness made the most graceful of courtesies, according to all the rules of the art, and fearlessly replied:

"Nothing, except a declaration of war by Russia."

"How?" exclaimed the king, starting involuntarily, for the air was laden with wonderful things, and the ladies of the upper aristocracy were at that time the most excellent political barometers.

"By Russia, England, France, ..."

"Then I am calm.'

"In short, by all Europe. People are utterly exasperated with your majesty. It is claimed that your majesty wishes to transform bright spring to winter, by withdrawing from the world, and becoming a new hermit of Chaussée d'Antin. Eight days without a *cour* at the court,—the world is going under! Scarcely a paltry parade, and not a pleasure party to Drottningholm or Ulricsdal,—and that I venture to call a total eclipse of the sun! The ministers growl, the poets drape their lyres with crape, and all Sweden is in despair. As to my sex, it will have the honor of leading the rebels at the impending revolution."

"Your sex, madame, shall not escape its deserved punishment, and you shall yourself make the beginning by playing Calypso at the next *divertissement.* Provided, however, that you are satisfied with the Telemachus I have intended for you."

"Who is it, if I may venture to ask?".

"My new private secretary. I remember that you recommended him with an eloquence which was immensely becoming to you."

"Is your majesty not pleased with my *protégé?*" asked the marchioness, as with playful hand she spread her fan, which was ornamented with the most exquisite work in mother-of-pearl.

"I have somewhat against him. Only the mediocrity are fit for machines."

"Then make use of him where his heart can serve your majesty just as faithfully as his head."

"I am charmed that you repeat your *rôle* with so much naturalness, so much talent. You are going to be an unsurpassable Calypso. But *apropos des bottes*," continued the king, suddenly changing tone, "what advices do you get from Paris?"

"It succeeds, and it does not succeed," replied the marchioness, lowering her voice. "Aiguillon is for us."

"I was sure of that."

"Rochefoucauld is with us in the matter. All Choiseul's former friends are working with the greatest zeal for your majesty."

"Poor Choiseul! But that is no recommendation for us."

"La Brillière and his adherents are on the opposite side."

"*Diable!* I could believe that."

"De la Marck and De Boufflers are setting everything in motion. My aunt is indefatigable."

"Then I again breathe. Your aunt, madame, has in all the world only one rival, and that is yourself."

"Alas, sire, my worst news comes last. Du Barry is bought by the English minister."

"What do you say! Du Barry? Good Heaven! why, then all is lost! The power of Du Barry is greater than that of the king himself."

"So it is, your majesty. She has already forgotten that magnificent necklace of jewels which you gave her lap-dog. We must offer her more than England, and, for that, mountains of gold will not suffice."

"You are right," said King Gustaf gloomily. "It has gone so far that I must cringe before a woman whom I despise."

"Never, your majesty," replied the marchioness, with high-borne head. "You have done so once, sire,

and you now see what you gained by it But if I were in your place, I would sink, rather than for the second time condescend to a—degradation."

There was a pause, and the king once more sunk into a dejection which he no longer troubled himself to conceal. Then the marchioness, in her former cheerful tone, said:

"Does your majesty really believe that I have come hither only to tell your majesty such disagreeable news? No, pardon; my humble intention was to ask if your majesty would be pleased to grant me the favor of seeing your majesty at a little *dejeuner dinatoire* which I have had arranged at Brunswick. The weather is charming, and your majesty shall find only faithful friends."

"Very well," said King Gustaf, and the cloud on his forehead again vanished for a short time, like mist in the sunshine.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FESTIVAL AT THE ZOÖLOGICAL GARDEN.

THE little hunter's lodge near Brunswick was unrecognizable. Its old walls were hardly to be seen for leaves and flowers; from the windows fluttered little blue and gold flags of silk, and the steps resembled a bower of roses. And yet this was only a provision against a possible rain. The place which Marchioness Egmont had chosen for her rural *dejeuner dinatoire* was a pretty green meadow between leafy hillocks with a view of the bay, and was situated further toward the interior of the park.

Here tables had been spread for thirty persons,—that was the extent of the company, but the arrange-

ments were all the more exquisite. The marchioness knew her royal guest: like the butterfly, he lived on honey and the fragrance of flowers; he ate little and quickly, but liked sweet things; drank just as little, but yet could spend hours at the table. The coarser enjoyments were lightly esteemed by him, but subtle wit, happy grace, the playful jest, brilliant men, lovely women, taste in the arrangement, care in the toilets, the new, the ingenious, the intellectual, the surprising, gayety, bright colors, and a flattery so extremely delicate that it was scarcely perceived except like an odor of oranges carried by the wind, — that was what Gustaf III loved, and what his inventive hostess had sought to prepare for him.

She had been royally lavish. She had emptied all the Stockholm conservatories of roses and narcissuses, and when there were no more she had exhausted all the milliners' stocks of artificial flowers. But then there was not an oak, a linden or a poplar, as far as the eye could reach, whose top was not strewed with flowers. Even the larch-trees and pines, which were here and there seen to mingle their darker tone with the lighter masses of foliage, found themselves with surprise adorned like Christmas trees with garlands of roses and a network of tinsel paper. It was somewhat comical to behold the hundreds of little songbirds which were swarming around everywhere, with astonishment and curiosity, hopping from branch to branch in the trees so unwontedly fitted out, pecking to examine what all those astonishing bits of finery might really be good for.

It was quite French, this dressing up nature in artificial flowers; but the marchioness did not think of that. It was something new, and it looked pretty.

She had also looked out for a little flock of sheep. There were six snow-white lambs, led in red silken ribbons by little girls who were intended to represent shepherdesses. The attendants at the table were cos-

tumed as fawns, satyrs, bacchantes and forest-nymphs. Two negroes shaded the table with a broad umbrella. A pretty Peruvian girl stood ready every moment to waft coolness with a large fan representing a bird of paradise. A little blue-eyed naiad poured lemonade out of an improvised fountain at the foot of an old oak A little faun blew the flute. The semi-circular table was spread in the form of a G, and the Roman III, which ought to follow, were represented by three small oblong tables side by side, with three covers each ;—the first for the king, Princess Sophia Albertina and Countess De La Gardie; the second for the hostess, Prince Frederick and Count Scheffer; the third for the favorite, Baron Sinclair, Countess Lewenhaupt, and Lady Fersen. Prince Charles was absent, being with the fleet in Carlskrona.

A glorious sunshine, and a warm spring-breeze which set all the blossom-wreathed tree-tops swinging and all the fans fluttering, completed the picture. Gustaf III, like all great or somewhat great Swedish kings, had luck in weather.

Dinner was now ended in the cheeriest mood, and with side-splitting merriment, which reached the utmost margin of court etiquette, but not a hair's breadth beyond it, for the king tolerated no raillery with his dignity. He called himself "the first citizen of a free people," but if the second citizen of the kingdom turned his back to the first one, it was all over with royal favor.

After dinner the king offered the marchioness his arm, and the company set out on a promenade in the park. On an eminence with an unobstructed view, the marchioness had been thoughtful enough to have some sofas placed.

"Do you see," said the king, "that little cottage over there on the other side of the bay? I do not suppose it will eclipse Versailles or Trianon, but come back in

ten years, and you shall see what I have made of my Haga!"

"Say a century, sire, just as well, for if I live ten years I shall surely live a hundred, and in eighteen hundred and seventy-two I will have the honor of soliciting your majesty's arm to admire the institutions founded by your majesty."

"You give me plenty of time, my lady," said the king, smiling, "and the only danger is that in eighteen hundred and seventy-two you will see ruins instead of pleasure-palaces. But what do you think of the zoölogical garden?"

"The same as of Sweden," replied the marchioness; "a glorious wilderness, a chaos, where a thousand allurements are only awaiting their creator. This park is a royal realm whose throne stood vacant until your majesty was pleased to be born."

"And to-day you think I am making my royal progress. That is why my leafy subjects have made a ball toilet."

"And your majesty's winged subjects send up the Te Deum."

"I promise you, madame, that the zoölogical garden shall no longer remain a wilderness, if it were only in revenge for your comparison. Give me free hands, and your prophecies shall become a truth. But," and here the king lowered his voice, "Du Barry, Du Barry is not of your opinion!"

"Neither have I ever been of hers," replied the marchioness, with a captivating petulance of contempt.

"Without France I am lost!"

"And without the estates your majesty is saved! But *apropos* of the estates, will your majesty be pleased to bestow a moment's attention on a part of your faithful people whom I see approaching there near the bower?"

The king's eyes sought the direction indicated, and four strangely dressed pairs were seen approaching the

little level below the hillock, where they arranged themselves behind each other for the game of widower. The first of the pairs presented themselves as Don Quixote and his Dulcinea, the second represented a cardinal and an abbess, the third a pattern-monger and a female brewer, and the fourth a Visigoth bag-monger and Finnish fortune-teller. All of them wore *caps*, of the most outlandish form.

"But I do not see any widower," remarked the king, who very well understood the intention.

"Here he is, your majesty!" and forth sprung a light-footed young gentleman costumed as Public Opinion, as could be perceived by the weather-vane in his jaunty black velvet cap. This gentleman placed himself in front of the four pairs and cried: "Last pair out!"

Immediately the Visigoth and his Finnish woman undertook to run apart with all their might with the intention of once more overtaking each other, but they stumbled so clumsily that both were soon caught, and, bound with chains of flowers, led before the king, where they bent the knee. Of course that was not altogether according to the rules of the game, but it was received with gracious pleasure.

After them, at the same challenge, followed the pattern-monger and the brewer-madam. They jogged off somewhat further, but shared the same fate. Neither did it go any better with the cardinal and abbess, although they seemed to protest with all the dignity which their office demanded.

"Last pair out!" shouted Public Opinion, and Don Quixote and his Dulcinea took to their heels. They ran desperately, they made all conceivable *detours* over hillocks and impediments, but of no avail; Opinion was spryer, they were overtaken and caught, and like their predecessors taken in rosy fetters to the feet of the king.

The marchioness laughed like a frolicsome child,

and all the rest held handkerchiefs to their mouths in order not to give offence by an improper hilarity. But it was not very dangerous. His majesty was pleased most graciously to open his mouth and laugh with them.

"Here, sire," said Opinion, "I bring some rebels to the feet of your majesty, who have come to call on the most patient and gracious of kings for the pardon of their many mis-steps, and to beg that they may lay down their most humble tribute before your majesty."

"*Allons*," said the king, "what have my most loyal rebels to offer me?"

The Visigoth presented a little keg filled with hazel-nuts; the pattern-monger filled a tray of champagne; the cardinal presented a cheese; and Don Quixote, with much ceremony, produced a magnificent crown of candy.

"I thank you," said the king, as he broke off a piece of the crown and carried it to his lips, "and as a reward for your submission I restore you your liberty."

A general jubilation followed these significant words, and all thought that the game was as ingenious as it was bold.

"Well, have you no fortune to tell me, lovely sibyl?" said the king to the old fortune-teller.

"Your majesty is going to find something," replied the sibyl, who was no other than Ulla Fersen, one of the three graces of the court.

"What will it be?"

"A crushed heart," she replied, with a delicate and noble allusion to the neglected queen, Sophia Magdalena, to whom she was acting maid-of-honor.

The king did not reply. He sat down on the grass near Marchioness Egmont.

"I am not avaricious," he whispered, "but I would be thankful if your fairies could now place a Peru at my disposal."

"Does your majesty believe in the art of making gold?"

"Oh, yes, at the theatre, madame!"

"I mean in reality. There is said to be an alchemist in Stockholm quite lately. Trustworthy persons have assured me that he has transmuted bars of iron to the pure metal, for a representative by the name of Larsson."

"Where is the man?" asked King Gustaf, who believed in all sorts of things except what the clergy said to him.

"His name is Doctor Weis, and he is at present in the alchemist's proper country—in Danvik."

"I could believe that," replied the king, as he sunk into an unusual abstraction.

The marchioness was reclining carelessly in the soft grass, picking to pieces the leaves of an innocent wood-anemone. Bending aside a stalk of grass, she found a small, strangely-shaped ring of copper.

Her lively imagination was immediately ready with a new idea.

"I have the honor of congratulating your majesty," said she.

"Upon what?"

"Upon being betrothed to the zoölogical garden."

"*Qu'est . . . ce que c'est?*"

"Here is a ring, you see, which has placed itself at your majesty's feet, and which will always remind your majesty of his promise . . . . before eighteen hundred and seventy-two."

The king smiled, and looked at the apparently insignificant ring.

"I shall keep it as a souvenir of you, madame, and of your charming hospitality."

"And of the estates' crown," merrily responded the marchioness. "But, sire, I have learned to doubt the promises of all men, even yourself. Permit me, therefore, to encase your engagement ring in this locket,

which may perhaps obtain the favor of being put away among the jewels of the realm."

"Say rather on my heart," said King Gustaf, laughing, and concealing the ring.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE KING OF THE WISE AMONG FOOLS.

AT Danvik, everything seemed to be topsy-turvy. Everybody was scouring and sweeping for dear life. The poor lunatics were driven out into the yard, in order that their foul stable, where they had lived like cattle in stalls, might at last be cleansed, and with dull and faded eyes they looked at the glorious spring sunshine. Up to this time, the government had troubled itself but little about this, the grave of the living, although there was also a hospital for people affected with ordinary disease. But here at Danvik all was dilapidated, ill-tended, disgustingly wretched; and now everything was to be hurriedly scrubbed up. The grave was now to take on the appearance of a human dwelling, the stable a transient look of a charitable institution. And on that account all the pens were to be dried, juniper twigs to be strewed on all the floors, and the lunatics scrubbed clean and clad like human creatures. Not that they were looked upon as deserving of such consideration, —the humane care of a later time for these unfortunates was at that time somewhat unknown, — but that a message had struck down like a thunderbolt among the careless wardens of the hospital that the king, the king himself, was going to visit Danvik, at three o'clock on the afternoon of this day.

The time was very short to make good the neglect

of years, but everything possible was done, and thus arrived the dreaded hour when his majesty's carriage rolled into the stone-paved court.

The king, accompanied by his adjutant, his physician, and his private secretary, looked over the institution with much attention, and expressed his severe disapprobation of its dilapidated condition, which no scouring and juniper twigs could conceal from his keen eyes. The manager received a reprimand, and the order was given for proposals to be made for placing the institution in a more suitable condition.

His majesty afterward made a circuit through the cells of the maniacs, and had descriptions of the worst of them taken. There were forsaken women, who in frenzy had murdered their children; dissipated gamblers, who kept faro banks with chips and pebbles; used-up representatives, who offered for a dollar to procure his majesty the plurality at the election for marshal of the diet; one called himself Luther, another the pope, the third anti-christ, and the fourth the great mogul. A butcher imagined himself to be Frederick II of Prussia; a student said he was Charles XII; an old court lady coquetted with her fan, and gave him to understand that she was Pompadour; a poor grocer's wife, who had read romances, declared herself to be Alaric and Göthilda; a bearded sailor had got it into his head that he was Queen Elizabeth of England; a muddled *magister* begged the king to help him to his throne, as he was the pretender Stuart. Among those ruins of human passions and errors there was also an old lover of ease by the name of Calle Sager, who said he was expecting promotion on the ground that he had luck with the ladies, and played the flute.

"Is there a person here by the name of Dr. Weis?" inquired the king.

The warden coughed, and declared that the person in question was confined in a separate room, together with another lunatic, as he was considered dangerous.

"Why is he considered dangerous?"

"He is said to be a terrible magician, and there is something not exactly right about his Christianity," replied the warden.

"Take me to him," commanded the king. "Meanwhile, you, gentlemen, may remain here."

"Will your majesty permit me to go with you, as I know the man?" asked Paul Bertelsköld.

"Very well. *Allons.*"

In a remote wing of the hospital was a good-sized room, with iron-grated windows, and divided by a paling into two apartments. In each apartment lived a lunatic, and through the paling the two could converse with each other. Yet while the lunatic to the left, a tall, aged, snowy-haired man, sat free, though shrunken into his corner, the inmate to the right, who seemed to be considerably younger, wore heavy chains and iron bands around his wrists and ankles.

Unperceived, the king and his companion paused awhile at the open door, and heard the two lunatics talking with each other.

The snowy-haired lunatic held a billet of wood in his arms, and was examining it with much care. "It is pure gold," said he, "fine gold of twenty-four carats; but what can it weigh? You may make me a few more lumps, Dr. Weis. You know I told you you should have a liberal recompense. You shall have my daughter and grand-daughter, and child and grand-child, if you will; but my soul you see I cannot sell cheap, do you understand? What do you offer for my soul?"

"Will you let me alone, old fool, or shall I pull down the roof upon you!" angrily muttered the other lunatic, as he lay face downward on the floor, and with his nails scratched triangles and circles in the hard planks.

"You shall have sixteen per cent net," persistently continued the other. "I am a poor man, I have scarcely my daily bread. Do you not know some kind-

hearted person who will give me four öres for a measure of small beer? But you see we must be making something, we must work, we must get us more gold. Oh, you most beautiful lump of gold!" he continued, rocking and caressing the billet of wood in his arms. "Oh, you rarest little lump of fine gold, how prettily you shine! Why, you see I have nothing in the whole world but you, little crumb of gold! How light you have grown, you who were once so heavy! And beyond the world, in heaven, there is nothing at all but shining ducats. You see for that reason I too want to go to heaven, dear gold! Grant unto us a pleasant death. Amen!"

"If your brain was not so utterly muddled by your cursed gold," now interposed his comrade in misfortune, "I might tell you something, Larsson! The scoundrels have thrown me into chains because I am the ruler of the world, and if I had my right arm free I might pull up the Scandinavian mountains by the root and throw them like pebbles into the Arctic sea. But you are free, Larsson, and you can do me that service, you know. Go to the zoölogical garden, and search there in the grass, search night and day, search for a hundred years, and you shall not have done so in vain. Search for that same ring which you once wore, that one with R. R. R. on the inside; and it is of copper you know, yet all the gold in the world is nothing to it. But be careful not to keep it, or I shall transform you to slag! Bring it to me, and I will make you mountains of gold, oceans of melted gold, Larsson! For you see I have lost my star-compass, which always pointed out where it was to be found, and you know it was for the sake of that that I came to this cursed north. The stars, you see, rule the universe; but the jewel that lies in the grass at the zoölogical garden rules the stars, and those lunatics who have hitherto possessed it have not understood that. But now I

come, who alone in the whole world know how to make use of such an enormous power, and then it is stolen from me! Say, is it not a crying shame?"

"I will go immediately, if you will give me in advance five lispunds of genuine unadulterated ingots of gold!" responded Larsson, with a crafty wink.

"Well, here you have them," replied the doctor, as with an important air he counted out, as well as the chains would allow him, five other billets of wood which were standing by the wall.

The two lunatics were trying to out-wit each other, both to attain their souls' most secret desire, the only lucid point in their terrible darkness.

The king now appeared and gave orders for the unchaining of the prisoner in the right-hand room. This was done, but it did not seem to produce any particular impression.

"You are now free," said the king, "and if you are the one you pretend to be you shall soon leave this house. Answer me: can you prove that you can really transmute iron to gold?"

"That does not concern you," snappishly replied the doctor.

"Do you know who I am?"

"You are one of those ordinary fools who gape their mouths out of joint after a handful of dust."

"I do not care about gold for its own sake, but I would like to do something with it," said the king, embarrassed in the presence of a lunatic.

"Wine, girls, dice—what is your pleasure? Such, of course, you have without my aid. Power, honor, conquests—have you a taste for more? Go home, poor king, and lie down! That which is to come will come while you are asleep. Remember that the king of kings has told you that!"

"You know me?"

The doctor smiled disdainfully.

"Well," said the king, who wished to make one

more attempt, "if you can transmute iron to gold, I will admit that you are more powerful than I. And I do not ask such a favor for nothing."

The lunatic sneered. "What would you, insignificant little snow-king, be able to offer the king of the wise who is caged among fools?"

"You wish to regain a ring?"

The brown eyes of the lunatic flashed.

"You shall have it after you have filled my treasury"

Once more the king of the wise caged among fools sneered.

The king produced the locket, which was hanging by a silken cord in his bosom, and showed the ring.

"Beware, sire!" exclaimed Paul Bertelsköld. But it was too late. The effect was instantaneous. The lunatic threw himself upon the amazed monarch, seized him by the throat with the ferocity of a tiger, and if Paul, who was watching all his motions, had not quickly thrown himself between them and pulled from the wild beast its prey, that would have been the end of the reign of Gustaf III. and not all the power of Sweden would have been able to prevent it.

"*Ma foi*," said the king, with a tranquillity which was contradicted by his pale cheeks, "the king of the wise is not gentle toward us other unwise monarchs. . . . . Come, Bertelsköld, I have heard enough."

The door was bolted, and the king withdrew. He had had enough of the art of alchemy.

The lunatic remained, but his darkened mind had fallen into a terrible commotion. He flew in perfect frenzy against walls and doors. He climbed with an incredible agility up the smooth wall to the little grated window placed high in it, and smote his head against its iron bars. He shouted that he would bury the whole world in ruins, if that jewel, which governed the stars, and at its will changed or hurled to destruction the whole fabric of the world, was not restored to him.

Not until late in the evening did the watchmen observe the noise subside, when they ventured in to put the chains once more on the raving lunatic. They found him extended motionless on the floor. The king of the wise was dead among fools.

Shrunken into his corner sat the old Larsson, looking at his comrade in misfortune with bewildered eyes. A spark of reason seemed to glimmer through the night of his insanity. Dim recollections from former times when the Bible was daily read in his father's house seemed to find their way to his lips, and he muttered softly to himself:

"Take unto thyself wisdom, for it is better than gold, and to have understanding is nobler than silver.

"But the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SECOND TRIAL.*

"WHERE is Count Bertelsköld, that he has not been seen here for so long?" inquired somebody one evening at "Svenska Botten."

"He is sick," said one.

'He is crazy," said another.

"He has become pious," interposed a third, "and it may as well become known at once."

"I have heard that he has become a Catholic," said a fourth. "A disguised nun has converted him."

* Remembering the old grandmother's dissatisfaction over the preceding story, the Surgeon had here found a suitable opportunity to send away the little ones to crack nuts for him down-stairs, so that they were absent during the recital of this chapter.

"The devil! That is likely enough. She is young and pretty, I suppose? I call that a very sensible reason for changing his religion."

"In case one happens to have anything of the kind. Have we not a statute against luxury and extravagance?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Say that to the bishops."

"The bishops are of the same opinion."

"I congratulate you. It would not be so bad to try a pastorate, when one had got enough of diet-dissension. I might in sooth preach for the peasants."

"That would be rich. I wonder what text you would choose."

"Enlightenment, of course. I would tell them that the Bible is a worn-out old lie of the priests, that the catechism was invented to beat the skulls of stupid boys, that the church was made for a morning nap, and that the so-called religion is very useful, partly as a cavesson for unsteady people, and partly as a machine instituted solely for sheep-shearing."*

"Just hear that heretic!" cried several voices. "If he keeps on in that way, he will become a cardinal at the very least."

"But, after the old rubbish is swept away, what will remain?"

"Liberty, enlightenment, philosophy, and—morality."

"Beautiful! How many ducats did you win at biribi, yesterday, from your neighbor?"

"Only sixty," calmly replied the person questioned.

"And how many girls have for your sake jumped into Norrström?"

"I have forgotten to count them."

* Here the Surgeon remarked: "It is a great mistake to look upon the contempt for religion as having entered Sweden under Gustaf III. It crowded in during the whole of the preceding time of liberty, particularly toward the close, through the open rifts of the time, from France, and the seed was sown long before, leaving it to come to the ear under Gustaf III, and during the French revolution to ripen for the harvest."

"No, my good sirs, cardinal is too little; he must be pope!" noisily vociferated the jolly company.

In the midst of these jeers, Bernhard Bertelsköld stepped in and inquired for Colonel Sprengtport. He was pale and serious, and above the left eye carried a scar. Of the former sneer on his lips, not a trace was to be seen.

The noise became hushed. There was something about the new-comer which laid a check upon every tongue. He had never been loved by his acquaintances at the club, but rather feared for his sarcastic habit, and his insufferable sneer. A strong inclination, therefore, existed to humiliate him, the more so as he was suspected of having run counter to the club on political by-ways.

A single member broke the silence, and that was the same young ensign whom the company had wished to nominate as pope, and who was endowed with an extraordinary difficulty of holding his tongue.

"Well, see, here comes Bertelsköld," he exclaimed, "on purpose to decide an extremely intricate question. Some claim, count, that the nun who converted you to the Catholic religion was as fair to the eyes as a Spanish moonlight night, while others maintain that she was invited to be bridesmaid when Louis XIV married Madame Maintenon, seventy or eighty years ago."

Bertelsköld was silent. His mind was far from made up. He seemed to himself like a leopard with its claws cut off.

"I beg pardon if we have been mistaken," mockingly continued the ensign. "There are others, count, who assert that you have become a Mohammedan. Allah is great, and Mohammed is his prophet."

"Is Baron Sprengtport in the club?" inquired Bertelsköld.

"We expect him every moment, count, and meantime you can pass away the time by telling us about your conversion," replied another of the company,

who began to find the jest amusing. "Do you know the chapter by heart, count?"

"Oh, have the goodness to repeat a part of the mass for us; it will be extremely edifying!" interposed another.

"Or preach to us about the oxymel of the Sadducees!" proposed a third, who wanted to air his biblical knowledge. "We are all Sadducees; we do not believe in the resurrection of the body in any other form than a beefsteak that returns from his grave."

"And we have just been amusing ourselves in deposing the Lord. The old man is getting antiquated, and the clock-work needs repair. Do you not know of some other clock-maker, count?"

"Count, do you believe in Saint Bridget?"

"Count, do you believe in the devil?"

"Of course. *On revient toujours à ses premiers amours.* The count and the devil are old brothers."

"*Fi donc*, gentlemen, there is a smell of brimstone here. Have you no compassion? Count Bertelsköld is fainting."

Count Bernhard did not faint, but he looked as though he might. He was very pale. It was his past life which was now turning against him with the keenness of thorns. This was his first external struggle against that world he had renounced, and now was the time to choose his colors.

"Gentlemen," said Count Bernhard, as with a powerful effort he suppressed his boiling anger, "I am not going to preach for you, but, if you will permit, I will tell you a little traveling adventure I had in Spain."

"Do so, do so! Tell us some interesting love adventure!" said his audience mockingly.

"I was one time passing through the arid mountain steppes in New Castile and La Mancha, from Toledo to Villafranca in Andalusia. The country was not lacking in picturesque beauty, and the muleteer who was my guide did not cease to praise his native land, as the

most beautiful country under the sun. Often when I looked upon the lofty mountain tops gilded by the glow of evening, or when the road wound near frightful precipices, I was ready to join in the same eulogies. But again when I saw that land so desolate and unfruitful, and, in the heat of that burning sun, did not find one single refreshing fountain to slake my thirst, but only turbid water or exciting wine, then, although I wished to persuade myself that nothing ought to be more agreeable than a journey in those mountain regions, I longed to be away from them. At last we descended from the mountains, and approached the fertile and luxuriant plains of Andalusia, intersected by innumerable rills, among which the bright Guadalquivir, majestic and calm, wended its silent way to the sea. How utterly unlike the burning deserts, from which I had come, was that land! How pure was the air, how blue the sky! The birds sung, and the fields were odorous of health. It seemed to me as if peace and blessing rested like a celestial transfiguration upon that charming landscape. But my guide was of a different opinion. He thought Andalusia level and tedious; he longed to go back to the deserts and their turbid fountains, and derided me as a fool when I would not return with him. What do you think, gentlemen? Which of us was right?"

The hearers were silent.

"I do not believe," continued Bertelsköld, "that many of you would have been of a different opinion from myself. And yet when you see a wayfarer step out from the arid wilderness of this world, from the quenchless thirst, and the precipices by night, to the beautiful, living-water-fountains of the kingdom of God, you say like the muleteer, 'What a fool!' I will not dispute with you about it. But, if you knew that realm which you despise, many of you would perhaps follow the eternal Guide, and be surprised at your

blindness in having so long seen the light of life, and yet remained in the shadow."

"Amen!" said the young ensign, with mocking solemnity.

"But, my dear Bertelsköld," said one of the older and more serious in the company, "do you really believe that such a nursery-tale as Christianity will stand before reason in the century of enlightenment? In twenty years there will be no more Christianity."

"In twenty years,"* said Bertelsköld, "it will perhaps be said, as it was said once before when the history of the world was turned on its hinges, 'now is your hour and the power of darkness.' But when that hour is past, the eternal truth shall again break forth, brighter than ever before, and a hundred, yes, a thousand years hence, Christianity, triumphant, shall spread to all parts of the earth, while the 'century of enlightenment' shall remain in history as a vanishing moment in the development of humanity."

"Well!" said the ensign, "I make no pretensions to living so long, but after twenty years, if there is any Christianity left except possibly the clerical ruff, I will treat you to a crate of champagne, gentlemen."

"I accept the offer, in case I can by that time drink champagne," replied Bertelsköld, with a smile.

That fleeting smile found only a faint response. The jolly society of "Svenska Botten" was visibly uneasy, and at that moment Baron Sprengtport entered.

"Sir baron," said Count Bernhard, "I once insulted Marchioness Egmont, in your presence, and you demanded satisfaction of me. I declare in the presence of these gentlemen that I was wrong, and ask if you think I have thereby fulfilled the demands of honor."

"Perfectly, sir count!" replied Sprengtport, surprised. "And I will add quite as publicly that though

*1792

I disapproved of your conduct, I did not doubt your courage."

"I thank you," said the count, with a touch of the former courtier, "and as the gentlemen here will not probably be interested in continuing our former theme of conversation, I regard the object of my visit as accomplished, and wish the gentlemen good-night."

"How infernally solemn you all look, gentlemen!" said Sprengtport, when his antagonist had gone.

"That is because we have been to church and had a regular *douche*," said the ensign.

"A real fast-day sermon," suggested another.

"He is crazy," said a third.

"Oh, tell us some pithy bachelor story, or we shall all drown in our tears!" a fourth was heard to exclaim.

"Patience," said the leader, "we have more important matters to deliberate upon. The time is approaching."

"At last!" cried several voices, and soon every visible trace of Bernhard Bertelsköld and his conversion was buried in the burning furnace of politics.

CHAPTER XV.

THE 18TH OF AUGUST.

THE summer-night's sun had just sunken in the fiords of the Mälar hidden behind Riddarholm, when the wax-candles already began to be lighted in the royal castle of Stockholm. There was a great drawing-room, and the cream of the Swedish aristocracy, the diplomatic corps, and some of the most prominent representatives of all parties, were "ordered" to the palace.

The beautiful, magnificent *salons* were glorious with light; — royalty was to find in pomp a recompense for power. All was luxury, courtesy, ceremony, and yet the fetters of etiquette were not burdensome to any except those who were unaccustomed to them. The sunshine on the faces of the court was as unbroken as in Peru, where it never rains anything but gold. Hither came no wail from all the realm of Sweden, no cry of distress from famishing countrymen, no discordant sound from the great word-factory of the diet, and not a threat from the clubs gathered everywhere in town. There was tranquillity in the kingdom, tranquillity at court, tranquillity in the countenances of all,— the very deepest tranquillity.

But why did people throng so curiously around the young king, when at nine o'clock in the evening he made his appearance, more gracious and smiling than ever before? Why was he everywhere regarded with furtive, scrutinizing glances? What were they trying to read in those two sealed books, those two large, blue, Brandenburg eyes, which ruled, charmed and cheated all? They were trying to read there the morrow of Sweden; but, like the glitter of the waves on the shining sea, it could not be deciphered.

It was a strange tranquillity. It looked as though all clamorous powers had plunged down beneath the tranquil surface of the night, in order unseen to struggle in the silent deep. All knew that something was going to happen, and many even knew what. And yet no one pretended to have the least suspicion.

Thetis and Pelée was rehearsed. It was the first Swedish opera; all were charmed, or at least seemed to be, and the king most of all. He corrected mistakes, he praised the singers, and above all the ladies who took part. He applauded the prettiest parts of the piece, and turned over the leaves of the note-books, as though again he read the soothing melodies.

"And they say that man is thinking of a revolution!" whispered Chief Governor Ruth.

"Who knows?" whispered Councilor Kallingback.

"I think we would have done the wiser to imprison him."

"Him! Do you know what he was doing when I had audience this morning? While he was talking to me about events in Christianstad, he was drawing an embroidery pattern for Lady Posse."

"But we have certain advices . . . . "

"Try to make me believe that! Believe what you will about his adherents, but he himself is afraid. Just reflect,—it would be a calamity to the realm to break off the rehearsals of the new opera! — See, now he is sitting down to the card-table with Baroness Pechlin! If she has a spark of her husband's genius she will peep into his cards . . . . "

Paul Bertelsköld was standing not far distant. He was pale with overwork, for he had written far into the nights, and he had been writing *rôles*, but this time not of the usual sort. His eyes followed Marchioness Egmont. Never had she been so lovely, so radiantly beautiful. Wherever she appeared, all were dazzled and charmed. Envy herself hid her polished dagger, and people whispered to each other that the queen of Gustaf III ought to have been like her,—a counterpart of himself, a superior character, witty, happy, agreeable, and dignified in every motion!

Paul felt at the same time happy and deeply humiliated. Was that not the same charming creature who once, in the lonely moonlight of night, leaned her head with such unrestrained emotion against his shoulder, in the secluded refuge of the zoölogical garden? But that smiling and yet proud French woman, the admired of all, vouchsafed him no more than a single glance.

He then felt a paper pressed into his hand, and turned around, but the messenger had vanished.

The little perfumed sheet burned his hand. Paul glided to a window and read in French: "Some one is waiting for you in the yellow parlor."

"It must be she!" thought he to himself, and his heart began to beat violently. A few seconds afterward he was standing unobserved in the room indicated.

But instead of the marchioness he found an elderly military officer carelessly extended on the sofa. This person was one of those who need to be looked at three times. At the first sight he looked simple; at the second, jolly and phlegmatic; and at the third, crafty. It was General Pechlin, the most dangerous, shrewd and implacable opponent of the king and the Hats.

"Sit down, young man, I have something to say to you," said the general, with the straightforward manner of a military man, and the tone of a superior who does not expect any opposition.

Paul remained standing.

"As you please then," said the general, indifferently. "I know your father, my young sir. We have been political opponents, but I respect his principles, and he means too well with the country to wish to see his son on the scaffold."

"What does your excellence mean by that?" asked Paul, more surprised than frightened.

"I mean," continued the general, "that we are probably on the eve of a new '56. You cannot remember that year, young man; you were then in skirts, but I will tell you its history in a few words. The king tried to make his power absolute, but liberty was too hard a nut to crack; it miscarried, and all his nearest assistants had to mount the scaffold."

"I do not understand your excellence."

"Do not assume artlessness; you understand quite well. In short, you are the king's private secretary, and initiated into the secret. Consequently, you will

lose your head when the catastrophe is well past, to-morrow or the day after."

"Your excellence . . . . "

"Bah! Let us leave off phrases. I know all, and I am sorry for your father. I have, therefore, resolved to save you while there is yet time. Do you want to retain your head? Yes or no?"

"If it can happen honorably, I would like to keep it," replied Paul, with a smile.

"Honor and liberty are inseparable. Listen therefore to what I will confide to you as a friend. You have the name of being a visionary, but I will talk to you as to a young man of good sense. If, before morning dawns, you have not given me the whole plan of the revolution which I know you can procure me, you are lost beyond rescue."

Paul was silent. He felt the blood mount to his cheeks, but he had no words for his extreme astonishment.

The general misunderstood his silence. "Mark well," said he, "that I ask this of you in the name of country and liberty. That is my reason, and it ought also to be yours. But your reward shall not, therefore, be less. In recompense for your service you have the choice of a major's rank in the guard, or something corresponding in the civil service, and in either case forty thousand dollars for equipments. I think that will suffice."

"Forty thousand dollars! For me?"

"What now? So young, and already initiated in the art of extortion? I can increase the sum to fifty thousand, but not a dollar over. Are you out of your wits, sir? Why, that is gold enough to buy a whole department of the diet. And besides," he continued, correcting himself, "the question in this case is not about that, but *tout bonnement* about saving the country. Am I understood?"

"Perfectly. I shall immediately have the honor of . . . ."

"What? Perhaps you have the plan with you?"

"I shall immediately have the honor of reporting to his majesty the generous offer of your excellence."

"See here, my friend," said the general, with composure, "are you in your senses, or are you mad?"

"I was just intending to ask your excellence the same question."

"Indeed! Candor for candor. So you prefer being headless to being a major? You would rather ruin than rescue the country?"

"Your excellence can apply to those who are mercenary and cowardly enough to sell themselves to the highest bidder. I venture to think that men of honor, and not false-hearted traitors, are the ones who are to rescue the country."

"How edifying! But my well-meant proposal can remain between us, I suppose?"

"I do not perceive why I should be bound to that."

"Well, then look upon the whole affair as a mere joke. Adieu, my lord. I wish you much happiness when we next meet, on Market Square."

Paul coldly bowed, and proudly turned his back to him.

But when he had gone, a sneering smile flitted across the crafty features of General Pechlin. "That is just what I expected of him!" he soliloquized. "I like people who butt their heads against the wall; they save us a great deal of trouble. All the operas this evening go by note. The king will now be informed that we have *not* the plan of the revolution, which has been in my pocket for the last three hours. He will by that means be lulled into a sense of security, and put off everything until the day after to-morrow. Meantime our reliable regiments will have time to reach Stockholm, monseigneur will walk in civil arrest,

and the republic is complete. *C'est à merveille!* Those asses hardly deserve to be led by the bridle."

Paul again mingled in the crowd, with the intention of using the first opportunity to warn the king. But his majesty was still sitting at the card-table, as unconcerned as though he had no other crown in sight than that of the king of hearts. The marchioness was playing, with a couple of diplomats and General Horn.

At that moment she lost a card; Paul flew thither to pick it up, and as he stooped down he felt a warm breath at his ear, and heard a whisper as soft as the rustle of leaves in a summer night:

"Observe when I close the game!"

"Ah, *monsieur le comte*," said the marchioness, aloud, "I thank you. That is the first time I ever saw you bow so low."

"Youth is paying its reverence before the throne of Beauty," suggested gallant the Count Horn.

"There are a great many rebels," said the beautiful Frenchwoman, carelessly. "But what cards you have given me! Nothing but peasants and burghers! Why, that is abominable. A king, a queen, and a jack, but all the rest small cards!"

Paul withdrew, and from a window-niche silently noted the light murmur, the fluttering toilets, the smile on all faces, the king's animated gestures and merry flashes of wit, Pechlin's credulous and simple mien, and Marchioness Egmont's careless coquetry. Did not all this glitter rest on roses?

CHAPTER XVI.

THE HOBGOBLIN WITH THE RED CAP.

SILENT and dreaming, Paul Bertelsköld was standing by his window, when a hearty laugh reached his listening ear. It was from Marchioness Egmont, who was rising from the card-table, and jesting over the roll of ducats she had won of the English ambassador. "Admit, *milord*," said she, "that this money will be well employed! To-morrow I am going to buy half the diet with your gold, *milord*, and raise the Pretender Stuart to the throne of England."

"I fear your grace boasts in the game," replied the rigid Englishman, who did not like the jest.

"Who knows? I have never had luck in love, consequently I have luck in play. *Apropos* of games of chance, you have a bad memory, Count Horn. I remember distinctly that his majesty, who likes change, sometimes writes his royal name with *f* and sometimes with *v*. But there is some one who can settle our controversy. What do you say about it, my dear count?"

At these words, Paul approached.

"In Swedish, his majesty writes his name Gustaf, and in French, Gustave," replied Paul, with a reflex of the sunshine from the lips of the marchioness.

"Did I not say so? You must tell me if it is true that his majesty has an *esprit familier*, a terribly ugly looking hobgoblin in a red cap, who sits astride his chair, and dictates to him his poetic inspirations . . . . Your arm, if you will allow!"

And the beautiful marchioness, in her unconcerned way, took the arm of the young private secretary, as she continued to jest over the king's hobgoblin.

But by degrees they unobservedly got out of the crowd, and found themselves alone in a side-room, where the actresses in Thetis and Pelée had shortly before changed costumes. Then the marchioness sunk down in the nearest chair, and burst into tears, as violently, unrestrainedly and artlessly as a school-girl weeps over a dead canary bird.

"What is the matter, my lady?" asked Paul, perplexed by this quite unexpected outburst.

"Nothing; never mind about me!" she replied. "I am only weeping over this wretched life, and over myself. If you only knew what I have passed through within the last twenty-four hours,—ah, you would weep with me, man that you are, and it would become you, Bertelsköld! You have a heart! But I do not want to give you any sorrow, and so we will be happy. Look at me now,—is not this all right? Am I not happy again?"

And so sadly, so charmingly she smiled, while the tears were still glistening beneath her eyelashes, that that smile, far more than the unwonted sorrow, drew moisture to the eyes of the young man.

"Confide to me what troubles you," he pleaded. "My power is not great, but my whole life belongs to you."

"No," said she, "not now, not at all. In the morning you will perhaps find out more. And if unforeseen events should occur,—if we should see each other no more,—I do not want you to think ill of me. You know we are standing on the brink of a revolution?"

"I know it, my lady."

"All may succeed, all may miscarry. And in order to succeed, King Gustaf has needed time and money. I have procured him both. Do not ask me how. Content yourself with the assurance that the king was to have been arrested to-day by the council, but that it is deferred till the day after to-morrow, when the troops arrive, and that delay may save everything. As to the

money,—at noon to-day he was poorer than Charles Stuart, but for the last three hours he has had enough. Oh, this nation, this nation which in its poverty was once the most knightly and proud in Europe,—it is now bought and sold like any other commodity! But what is that to me? I am French. I have served Gustaf III because he is a high-minded king, and because I once thought I loved him . . . . You need not look so darkly at me, Bertelsköld. If I had reason to blush before you, I should not tell you that. I have loved him as one loves a brilliant meteor, and my admiration has long since outlived the dream of my love. In short, he must be saved. Could I do otherwise? Must I not sacrifice everything for him?"

"Yes, my lady. Everything except honor."

Trembling with anger, the marchioness sprung up.

"And what gives you the right, sir, to pierce me with poisoned arrows? Good heavens! When have I fallen so low that the first one to whom I open my heart ventures to remind me of my honor! Do you know, sir, why I was exiled from the French court,—yes, exiled by a polite letter from the Duke of Noailles! It is not known here, for I have not condescended to boast of it. I was exiled because at a *cour* of the court, when all were prostrating themselves before Countess Du Barry, I was the only one who had the courage to turn the back to her."

"You misunderstand me, my lady. I am incapable of insulting you with the slightest thought. I said only what I have every day said to myself."

"I will believe you, my lord. I should not believe any one else. In what a terrible time do we live! Where is the honor of man? Where is the self-respect of woman? The one is bought with a title, the other with a royal smile, and both are for sale for gold. Do you know, Bertelsköld, I am tired of all this wretchedness! I have seen enough of it. I want to go away to empty nothingness; it will be beautiful to perish. You

know our philosophers say that there is nothing beyond the grave. Is it not so? I remember that you too lay claim to a kind of philosophy!"

Paul started. He had not for some time thought of that. He had only heard his mother read aloud from the Bible, when he was lying wounded in the little hunting-lodge. It now suddenly became clear to him that before him yawned an abyss of terrible emptiness. What was he to reply? The dark doubt of the spirit of the age was sitting there before him in the most charming shape, armed with all the enchantment of beauty, with all the seductive witchery of first love, and, in passing, lightly threw out a question of life and death, of time and eternity. A shudder quivered through his inmost being; he would have liked to reply: Yes, yes, there is nothing beyond the grave! . . . . But he had not the power. He trembled at the thought that this gentle being should forever perish!

"No," said he against his will, "it cannot be so. There must be a God, and a life beyond this."

"Do you think so? It is possible, for the philosophers are no better than all the others. I wish it may be so. In this world there is no peace. I am twenty-four years old, and I have laughed more than many another at life, but believe me, I have never been happy. I was brought up in a convent, and thrown from it, while yet a child, into the arms of an old *roué*, whom I hated until I learned to despise him. Two years afterward, the marquis died; I was a widow, and made haste to resume my family name. But those two years had been enough to poison my faith in life. I resolved to laugh at everything, and I kept my word. My transient admiration attached itself to the brilliant and amiable crown prince of Sweden, when he was in Paris, but my heart remained empty and cool as his. And yet I too was formed to love as only a woman can love. I too sometimes felt a longing to give my life for another. But I did not understand myself. From a

desire for a change and from curiosity, I came to see a saga-like land which was not like ours. I did not think that among its cold ices I should some day find you!"

"My lady . . . ."

"Oh, my lord," sadly continued the beautiful French woman, "you need not answer me that you pity a poor, unfortunate creature, who thought herself strong, and yet was weak enough to confide to you what she perhaps ought forever to have shut within her own heart. We understand each other, and I do not know what should *now* prevent my telling you all. I have loved you, Paul, from the first hour I saw you, and you are my first, my only love. I do not know whether I ought to curse or bless the hour I saw you; I only know that my whole soul belongs to you."

"Herminie . . . ."

"Hold . . . say no more! There are holy emotions which are wounded to death in a single word. Do you think I would have told you what I now have in order to beg you to return my love? Oh, if you thought that, it would pain me more than if you declared a mortal hatred for me! No, my friend, ... let me call you thus; it is a cool word, and will perhaps calm us both; . . . . I tell you this because we are probably going to be parted forever. If you, with your nineteen years, could forget that I am five years older than you, I am too proud to wish to see myself some day crowded out by a younger rival, and I love you too well to wish to see you ensnared by that fleeting emotion you believe you cherish for me. No, my friend, that which now gives me courage is the certainty that we shall never belong to each other. Say no more, ask no more! Tell me only that, in case this meeting should be our last, you will sometimes think with affection of a woman who is not so coquettish, so frivolous, and perhaps so unworthy your esteem, as she seems in the eyes of the world . . . "

"And if you a hundred times crush me with those vague words about a separation, which I do not understand, it shall not hinder me from saying to you, Herminie, that I love you, that I breathe only for you, and that you shall be mine, even if I must struggle against a whole world and against yourself to make you mine!" burst out Paul, with all the transport of his nineteen years and his glowing heart. "And you think I would give you up, in such a moment as this, when for the first time I have gained a clear look into your soul, and for the first time understand that you are the noblest and most high-minded woman that I ever knew,—except one! Yes, Herminie, yes, my lady, you shall have a rival, . . . not such a one as you lately said, but one who will bless our love, and against whose heart you can lean as safely as a child. It is my mother, Herminie; she will understand you, she thinks like you; and who in the wide world will then be richer than I, who have *two* such hearts!"

Paul had taken her hand and was pressing it to his lips. Then a *valet* appeared in the door, and, perhaps not unaccustomed to such scenes, announced with extreme ceremony that the *souper* was served.

Paul did not observe him. He only felt a hot tear drop on his hand.

But the marchioness rose. "Farewell," said she in a broken voice. "By this time to-morrow our fate will be decided."

She then took his arm, and again entered among the guests, with the bounding step, the light fleeting smile on her handsome lips, and the charming coquetry admired by all the court.

"I know all about it now, your majesty!" said she merrily. "I now know that ugly goblin with the red cap, that rides on your majesty's chair when you write, sire, and who whispers to you the admirable things with which you charm the world. I would greatly like to know what he has to say to you to-night."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE 19TH OF AUGUST.

THE king had employed a part of the night in letter-writing, and had afterward visited the guards. He had now returned, and was sitting, thoughtful and sleepless, in his cabinet.

"What time is it?"

"Half past two in the morning."

"Is the day dawning?"

"Not yet, your majesty."

"Lie down in the outer room, Bertelsköld. You have slept but little lately, and the day which is drawing on may try our strength."

"I thank your majesty. I am not sleepy."

"Sleep, my friend, sleep! While the husbandman sleeps, the field ripens for the harvest. You promise, I believe, to take care of my letters to the Duke of Sudermania and to Count Vergennes?"

"They shall be dispatched by day-break."

"Very well. You are faithful and trustworthy, Bertelsköld. I thought you were a *raisonneur*, like the others."

"A dog is also faithful, your majesty. I do not serve my king for the monarchy, but for liberty."

"That is right. I shall not forget you if I live till evening. If I fall, I leave to the duke my bloody mantle."

"That will take place."

"You think, then, that I shall fall?"

"I think that your majesty is going to triumph."

"God grant it. Baron Pechlin deceived you when he wanted to buy the plan of the revolution. He had

it with him, just as he knew my letter to the king of France. Egmont was right: DuBarry has betrayed us."

"May I venture to ask your majesty whence Marchioness Egmont obtained money?"

"The marchioness? What do you know about that?"

"I only know that she has effected a delay of the council's plans, and procured money in a way which necessarily signified danger to herself."

"My God! And you have not told me of it before! She did not mention a word of that. I now understand all."

"I conjure your majesty to guard her life and safety. She is ensnared with cabals and envy. Once before she came near falling a victim to them. A *sauve garde* at her *hôtel* would perhaps not be superfluous."

"I will give Taube orders about that. But what danger can threaten her? Singular! . . . What time is it?"

"Three."

"It is time to sleep. You will await further orders."

Without disrobing, the king threw himself upon a sofa, and Paul withdrew. In the outer room the adjutant on duty was nodding in an arm-chair. An old *valet* was looking with melancholy eyes at the buckles on his shoes. A lamp, suspended from the ceiling, flickered as in a sick-room. A kingdom was sick.

Paul placed himself at a window. Before him lay the Swedish metropolis, still wrapped in the shadows of night, and only far in the remote east a faint streak in the sky above the sea seemed to announce the dawning day which was to decide the destiny of Sweden and its king for the next generation.

All was silent. Stockholm was asleep, Sweden was asleep, Finland was asleep. The long evening was past, the hand on the dial of the time of liberty pointed

to midnight, and the morning of the Gustavian period was dawning upon the horizon.

After twenty minutes the king rang, and Paul was called in.

"What do you think of the marchioness's ring?"

"I should value it for the giver's sake," replied Paul, who in this was quite ingenuous, and did not suspect how closely the jewel was connected with his own family.

"But you heard the insane alchemist ascribe supernatural qualities to the ring?"

"Yes. Why else would he have been insane?"

"There are things, however, which we cannot explain. But . . . sit down at the writing-table!" said the king after a little reflection.

Under the supposition that the business concerned some important order touching the revolution, Paul obeyed. The king dictated as follows:

"MY DEAR BARON:—

"In my letter of Wednesday, I made the remark that our old tennis-court is the most wretched theater in Europe, and in this particular can only be surpassed by its performers, Stenborg's Swedish *theâtre-troupe*. It is a disgrace to a beautiful art and a beautiful language. In case that through any unforseen event I should fall, I bequeath to you my *idé* of erecting a new theater on Norrmalm's square, where I have also intended to place a statue of King Gustaf Adolf. My opinion is that the Swedish theater can not crowd out the French under any form but the opera, which, uniting in itself all the resources of theater, music, painting and the plastic arts, will reconcile the ear with a language even harsher than ours. Among objects worthy an elevated taste, I recommend for our scene Birger Jarl and Gustaf Vasa. This in case we no more have an opportunity to confer on the subject. In the other event, I will, with your aid, take care that Sweden does not long lack a temple for the muses.

"Your affectionate—"

The king subscribed "Gustaf." He had time to think of everything. In that moment, when the crown sat so loosely on his head, and, with every oscillation of the pendulum, dangers were approaching, he had lain awake thinking of the Swedish muses.

"To whom shall I address the letter?" asked Paul.

"To Baron Ehrensvärd. . . . . What time is it?"

"A quarter of four."

"Give orders to have me wakened at seven o'clock."

Paul left the room. Fainter and fainter burned the lamp in the ante-chamber, and the early summer morning was beginning to dawn above the headland of Valdemar in the zoölogical garden at the northeast. Worn out by night watching, the young man sank down in a chair, with his head leaning against the window casement, and slept, contrary to his will, so heavily that he did not awake until the sun was high in the heavens.

Astonished, he sprang up. It was already eight o'clock; the hair-dresser had come, and the *valet* was busy dressing the king. On this memorable day, Gustaf III. wore black silk stockings, shoes with oblong silver buckles, black breeches, a plain blue coat with gilt buttons, a common, officer's sword, unpowdered confined hair, and a three-cornered hat without plume.

After having taken a horseback ride, the king retired to his room, to leave it again before ten o'clock. His ordinarily tranquil and bright eyes were dimmed by tears. But Gustaf III. was beautiful at that moment when, in a game for his crown, he went forth to rescue his kingdom from the fate of Poland.

He went to the council chamber, and it was the imperial council that began the revolution by the defiant demand that the king should read aloud the letter which he had the night before received from the Duke Charles. He refused, and an animated altercation arose. Some of the more impetuous of the councilors wished immediately to assure themselves of his person, and take from him his sword. They had already had rooms fitted up where he was to be held a prisoner at Kastenhof.

Councilor Count Kalling, who was invested by the

council with unlimited authority in the city of Stockholm, tried to prevent the king's leaving the council-chamber. Trembling with such anger, as he had never shown before, Gustaf III. tore himself loose, threw himself on his waiting horse, and rode to the artillery-yard, where he reviewed the troops. "Svenska Botten," and many other officers, had already gathered around his person, and, at the head of this crowd of friends, the king set out on his return on foot to the palace. From this moment, events crowded upon each other, and the fair-wind of public opinion grew to a tempest.

Paul Bertelsköld had in the morning been occupied with the king's orders, and not until eleven o'clock in the forenoon found leisure to go out. He then set out quickly for Marchioness Egmont's house on Drottning Street; but that day it was not easy to make his way. All Stockholm was in motion, and all the principal streets were filled with crowds of people. A report had swept like a hurricane through the city that something was on the tapis against the safety not of the kingdom, but of the king.

When Paul was about to turn to the left across Norrmalm's (now Gustaf Adolf's) Square, in order afterward by a turn to the right to enter Drottning Street, he found the road blockaded by several hundred sailors, journeymen, and iron-workers, who, irresolute, were flocked together around an uncommonly large and athletic man, clad in a threadbare blue wadmal jacket, tallowed seamed-boots, and a kind of student-cap awry over his ear. This figure, half gentleman, half servant-man, and, for the rest, of a good-natured jovial appearance, had, unnecessarily enough, for he was anywise a head taller than any of the others, climbed up on the steps of a store, and from that perch was making a kind of speech, whose well-known accent immediately indicated a Finn from the vicinity of Abo. Unfortunately, however, those standing some distance away

could catch only scattered fragments of the speech, for the audience was noisy, and shouted as loudly as the speaker.

"What is he saying over there?" asked Paul, who was unable to advance, and to his surprise recognized his honest old friend, Eudoxius Lejonfäll, nick-named Leo, the aforetime theological student of Åbo university.

"He is getting off something about the leaking in the hold; the vessel is careening, and the Finns are bracing the jib-boom," replied the person accosted, a sailor from the fleet, with an enormous quid of tobacco in each cheek.

"I think likely there is a stiff breeze rising, and we would do well to turn the helm and run up the royal colors," responded Paul, in the same tone. He very well knew of Sprengtport's secret embassy to Finland, with the design of beginning the revolution in Borgå and Sveaborg.

"Well, well! And so we are to sail in the wake of the Finns, eh?" cried the sailor, insulted in his Swedish ambition.

"Long live liberty! To the devil with the Finns!" shouted several voices.

"Down with that big lubber over there on the steps! Into the Rose-chamber with him, to beat the butter out of him!" cried the others.

It looked dubious for our friend Leo, and, what was worse, for the cause of the king.

"Is there not a student here?" the heavy bass of the unsuccessful speaker was heard to utter amidst the din, for he was beginning to get into difficulty on account of his dangerous news. But if there was a student to be found in the crowd, he kept discreetly silent, for the gathering consisted of just such people as Upsala students used every evening to fight with on the streets.

Paul drew nearer, and succeeded in arriving unob-

served at the steps just at the right moment, when a dozen hands were already reaching after the Finnish giant's threadbare wadmal collar, and he was hitting right and left with accustomed arm and imperturbable tranquillity, but with small prospect of being victorious over the superior force.

With one bound, Paul was at his side, and pushing back the boldest of the assailants, he shouted in a loud voice: "Long live the king!"

"*Kas perkele!* Are you here?" cried Leo, with delight. "Roll up your sleeves, and let us beat them black and blue, as many of them as there are! Long live the king!"

But Paul turned to the excited multitude, and, again raising his voice as high as he could, said: "Every noble Swede who to-day shouts 'Long live liberty!' must also shout, 'Long live the king!' They want to imprison our king; but while one honest Swedish heart beats, it shall not be done! And, therefore, I once more shout, 'Long live the king!'"

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN THE MIDST OF JUBILATION.

THE short speech of Paul Bertelsköld evidently produced a better effect than that of the preceding speaker. The crowd clamored as before, but opinions were divided.

"He lies, the nobility whelp!" bawled a slim journeyman-tailor, threateningly raising his terrible arm.

"Chop him into mince-meat!" shouted an heroic sausage-maker.

"Long live liberty!" cried a two-foot confectioner's-apprentice.

"But you see they must quit keelhauling the king!" muttered the sailor with the two quids.

"He is a good king, he stands on the side of the people against the lords," said the iron-workers.

"That is why the lords think of cutting his throat," put in a barber who never shaved any one but royalists.

"For shame! Quit throwing dust in people's eyes!" shrieked a hair-dresser of the opposite party.

Public opinion was swaying hither and thither, when royalty again gained a dangerous enemy in one of the Cap party's most shrewd and experienced assistants, the same Hallberg who had allowed himself to be made use of for the recruiting of peasants at the diet. He climbed up on another flight of steps, and made a speech in his fashion.

"You see the king is well enough," said he, "for any one who wants to be a dog and take a drubbing; but I am a plain peasant, and think that the Swedes might just as well be free as obey the whip. I do not know what the imperial council is about, but it is whispered here in the city that the king thinks of selling Finland to the Russians, and when that gentleman attains absolute power, he thinks of selling to the Hollanders all trade in tobacco, and to the Englishmen all trade in salt, and of imposing a poll-tax of two rix-dollars on all laborers, to be used with the Turks; for you see the gentleman needs money. And although I am only a poor peasant, I think that the council and the estates of the realm have got scent of the matter, and expect shortly to crack the whip."

"Long live liberty!" shrieked the adherents of the Caps, with all their might, as they began here and there to distribute money for a health to the estates.

Paul and his friends were perfectly out-voiced, and could thank their good luck that in the tumult they were forgotten. The king's cause looked ill.

Then from the vicinity of St. Jacob's church was

suddenly heard the noise of another and still greater mass of people, and soon the king was seen, surrounded by several hundred officers, and an innumerable swarm of all ages and conditions, coming on foot from the review at the artillery yard. He was warm with walking, his large eyes were glancing around with courage and confidence, and he continually bowed in every direction. So irresistible was the impression of his personality, that all artificial ill-will instantaneously melted away like snow in the spring sunshine. At every street corner the jubilation increased and the crowd was augmented. Every window was packed full of heads, and the very roofs held spectators. Flowers were thrown from the windows. It was a triumphal march, all the more transporting for being utterly unexpected and impromptu.

Like a huge, all-absorbing billow, this mass of people now poured out across Norrmalm Square, bearing all with it toward the palace. How contagious is enthusiasm! The same mechanics, sailors and iron-workers who had just before been ready to stone any who shouted, 'Long live the king!' now, carried away by the stream, were heard to chime in with the same cry. The weather-vane of the day was within a few moments altogether reversed, and in full fair wind, now pointed for royal authority.

"See," said King Gustaf to his companions, "the north wind is blowing!"

The north wind has always been regarded as a favorable omen, and when Gustaf Vasa in former days began the war of deliverance in the Dales, the norther was blowing.

Paul Bertelsköld could not resist the general transport. He put off his visit to the marchioness, took his friend by the arm, and followed the stream of people. Besides the king and his officers, only some few who were personally known were admitted by the

guard, and among them was Paul, who drew Leo with him.

They paused in the castle-yard, while the king made in the presentation hall that short and brilliant speech to the officers and subalterns by which the revolution was first proclaimed, and in which he solemnly abjured absolute power at the same time that he demanded the restraint of anarchy. All except Baron Cederström swore allegiance to him, and their cheer was heard down in the castle-yard.

"What does this mean?" asked Leo.

"It means that we have a king instead of the impress of a name," replied Paul.

"But why are those old gentlemen over there peering so anxiously out of the window?"

"They are the imperial council, who are deliberating in the council chamber whether it would not have been wiser to arrest the king two hours ago. Observe the embarrassed countenances of the gentlemen! They do not like the cheer in there. Power is so tempting, they have so long been omnipotent themselves, that they do not, without intense anguish of heart, see themselves again degraded to be subjects like us others. I suppose they already have a guard before the door."

And that was the case. The council that had wished to arrest the king was itself now guarded and caged. In order that the deposed petty kings should at least not suffer bodily distress, their dinner was served on the spot, but "their appetite was not particularly good," according to the testimony of an eye witness.

It was not long before the king, with his numerous suite, again appeared, mounted his horse, and rode with naked sword around the city, everywhere followed by the exulting multitude. He had tied a white handkerchief around his arm, and soon several thousand such scarfs were seen. People thronged around him; they kissed his clothes; they wept and huzzaed at the same time. All the troops swore allegiance to him, chains

were stretched in front of the castle gates, and cannons were drawn forth. Of course it could not be known that they were not loaded, for the artillery-men were standing beside them with burning matches.

One power still existed which had been able to attempt resistance, and that was the privy committee of the estates, which had so long represented the highest, the sovereign will of the people. But these gentlemen, like the council, lost all their ideas, and after they had vociferated among themselves awhile, without coming to any resolution, the secretary gravely locked the minutes in the desk, declaring that his office was now ended.

While in this manner the revolution was extending around the whole city, and Stockholm was surging like a restless sea, Paul Bertelsköld, with beating heart, hurried to Marchioness Egmont's hotel. He found a guard at the street-door, standing tranquilly with his musket on his shoulder. No assault had occurred, and no peril was to be perceived. Somewhat calmed, Paul sped up the secret staircase.

The door was bolted. He rapped. No one opened it.

He hurried down again, and bounded up the large staircase. Here the door was unbolted. Paul could not remember that this had ever happened before. But to-day anything was explicable. All the domestics, even Babette, were out on the streets.

With rapid steps Paul passed through the gay, magnificent deserted *salon*, thence in through the large parlor, and afterward through two or three inner rooms, quite as desolate as the *salon*, until, silent and with bated breath, he opened the door to the marchioness' inmost *boudoir*.

What a spectacle ! There lay the beautiful French woman, clad in her white morning costume, herself almost as white, extended on a little sofa, covered with light blue silk. She seemed to be asleep, but there was

no heaving of her breast. The rich brown hair, partly undone, fell over her half-covered shoulder. A hair-pin of diamonds which fastened her morning head-dress, sparkled in the light, and a white rose was fastened on her bosom. Her eyes were closed, her lips were shut. The expression of her face was stern and grave. That smiling, animated form, which lately seemed to live only for pleasure and joy, was now a statue of marble, with the seriousness of eternity spread over its beautiful face.

For a moment Paul paused, himself a motionless image of marble; but the next moment he threw himself on his knees beside the sleeper, and kissed her hand. The hand was still warm. He kissed her forehead, her lips, . . . they also were warm. But she breathed no more. She was dead.

This, he could not comprehend. His thoughts stood still. Time appeared to him to have paused in its course, and everything seemed to him like a dream. He did not weep. He did not rave. He made no attempt to recall her to life. Mute, motionless, oblivious, he sat there, all the time looking at that beautiful statue, with the exalted solemnity on the white forehead and the closed eyelids.

Beside the sofa stood a little table of mahogany, inlaid with mother-of-pearl. On this table lay a letter. When Paul's eye mechanically fell upon it, he saw his own name in the address.

Unconsciously he broke the seal, and almost unconsciously he read the following words in French:

"MY DEARLY LOVED ONE:

"We cannot belong to each other, so why should I live? Do not be angry at me for leaving life at the same time that I leave you! My life has been of no avail, and I desire at least that my death shall bring with it some blessing. Know, therefore, that I have procured for the king of Sweden that time and money without which he would not have been able to save his kingdom, in exchange for an oath which I cannot break. I have sworn to belong from this day to a man whom I abhor. But Herminie d'Egmont

will not sell herself. My creditor shall have only my breathless body.

"Oh, my beloved! We two have lived in a period of deep debasement. I pity you who with pure heart still remain. But live, my Paul, live for the noble, the truly great on earth! Live for another time when man shall again love his honor, woman her self-respect, and the nation its liberty! Give the same greeting to the king of Sweden, and to your mother. And afterward, . . . think sometimes, with affection, of a poor, unhappy woman who has loved you too much to wish to chain you to her squandered happiness, and who in death remains, with unstained honor,

Your Herminie,
MARCHIONESS D'EGMONT."

CHAPTER XIX.

A NAME.

WHAT a continuous jubilation were those days in Stockholm! It was not a revolution, it was a popular festival. It was not delight, it was delirium. No blood flowed, but all the more flowed ale, brandy, and the juice of the grape. One wise man, in speaking of the intoxicating joy in 1772, said that it was too intense to be lasting.

Everything indeed had been successful beyond all expectation. The burning matches had not been applied to the cannons, the ready cartridges had not been discharged. The closed gates had not transformed Stockholm to a prison. The chains before the palace gate denied that they were chains for freedom. Had not the king himself protested that he regarded it as his greatest honor to be "the chief citizen of a free people?" And how mildly, how courtly did he use his victory! Even the arrested petty kings were soon released, and the same gentlemen who in the morning had wished to prevent their monarch from

leaving his own royal castle, in the evening obtained the favor of kissing his hand.

After the first threatening measures, after the arrests and warnings, quickly followed the tranquillizing manifestoes, the voluntary royal assurance, the pardons and rewards, and the oaths of allegiance from high and low. How the handsome young monarch, with his gentle and yet dignified bearing, was admired! How people thronged around him wherever he appeared! When he halted his horse in the midst of the multitude, the people kissed his feet; and many of the haughty nobility, who had just been talking against the king in a tone of contempt, now competed for the honor of carrying the train of his mantle during this homage.

One alone there was who was indifferent to the general jubilation round about him; and that was Paul Bertelsköld. He had awakened out of his first pain, and lived for one other thought alone, . . . a thought closely connected with it. Enthusiastic in love and in hate, his whole soul hung on the bitter-sweet comfort; that, though he could not live for that beloved one, he would at least be revenged for her death.

Late in the evening of that memorable day, Paul was called to the king. He was obliged to obey, and went.

Gustaf III had been great that day, ... not because he had triumphed, but because he had pardoned. Around his brow still shone that royal pride of victory which was ennobled by the consciousness of having saved not only his crown but his nation. But the almost miraculous nature of his unexpected success seemed, in itself, to fill him with that emotion of humility which irresistibly seizes the conqueror on the battle-field, when he is conscious of being borne forward toward his object, by higher, invisible powers, mightier than his will, his weapons, or his military genius. With

a lofty, noble, royal gaze, he looked at the pale young man, and said to him :

"I have not summoned you, Count Bertelsköld, that you may share my joy, but that I may share your grief. I rejoiced that our happy revolution had not cost a single drop of blood, and I now find that the victory was bought at a high price. I have gained a kingdom, but lost a friend. If I were not, as king, obligated to place the happiness of my people above my personal feelings, I should perhaps confess to you that I have lost more than I have gained. Had it not been for Marchioness Egmont, I should now be a prisoner in my own castle. That is the only consolation I can write to the countess, her aunt, in Paris."

"I have a greeting to bring your majesty," said Paul, in a low voice, as he produced the last letter of the marchioness.

The king read it, and his countenance darkened.

"Do not ask to know any more about this secret," said he. "The person of whom the marchioness speaks is beyond the laws of my realm, and even if he were not, there is no proof. The consciences of the criminals must themselves be their judge."

"His name, your majesty! In mercy, only his name!"

"What are you asking of me? This happy day has already been clouded by sorrows; am I to darken it still more by an act of revenge? No, Bertelsköld, revenge, in this instance, would never reach its object; it would only hurl you, and perhaps myself, into ruin, aud set the toilsomely achieved welfare of my kingdom at stake."

"Your majesty was pleased last night to express your gracious gratification over my humble services, and to add a promise to remember me to-night. If I may venture to request that single name, I shall regard myself more than royally rewarded."

"No, not now, at least not to-day. You are not yet

able to control your feelings, and still you must. But if, after some days, you ask to know a secret which it would perhaps have been happier for you never to have suspected, I will fulfill your wish. To-day we will devote only regretful memories to that high-minded woman, who is far greater than you or any one except myself can guess, but who chose rather to be looked upon as a volatile coquette, than be the admiration of her time. Yes, she is right,—we must live for *true* greatness; for liberty, enlightenment, science, art, humanity. I will follow her counsel. I and your mother, she says! Your mother then must be an extraordinary character, for Marchioness Egmont was severe toward her own sex. Present my compliments to the countess, your mother, and my wish to see her presented at court. I remember that she is a born Countess Stenbock?"

"My father's first wife was a Countess Stenbock, but I am a son of his second marriage," replied Paul, blushing against his will. One person existed which made him forget even Marchioness Egmont, and that was his mother.

"Ah, I remember now," responded the king, who knew all the noble families in the realm, "your mother's maiden name was Falkenberg."

"That was my grandmother," replied Paul; and added in a firm voice, "my mother was a Larsson, the daughter of a Vasa burgher."

The king smiled, perhaps to conceal a certain embarrassment; for presenting a burgher's daughter at court, even though she were a newly-fledged countess, could hardly come in question. But he instantly collected himself, and complaisantly responded:

"So you belong to the Vasa stock, on the mother's side. The name is so dear to me, as to every Swede, that I would like to be able to do something for the town of Vasa, and when I have opportunity I will confer with your mother about it. But you need rest and

quiet, my dear Bertelsköld. How long a vacation would you like?"

"I shall be grateful if your majesty will allow me a month to visit Falkby."

"It is granted. Is there anything else you wish? For instance, the title of Gentleman of the Bedchamber?"

"I thank your majesty, but I do not know how to place value upon that."

"Your mother is Finnish, so I pardon you for having a will of your own," pleasantly responded the king. "Then I shall act accordingly, and try to invent something more to your taste. *Au revoir.*"

With a thorn in his heart, Paul departed.

Then followed those memorable days when the work of the revolution was completed by a legal ratification. On the twentieth of August the oath was taken by all the departments of the government, and by the citizens of Stockholm. On the twenty-first of August the estates so lately absolute were assembled to place a king on the throne of the nation. History has borne witness of that day, and this story shyly steps into the shade, only to pluck a trampled and forgotten blossom from the broad highway.

It was then King Gustaf made the most beautiful of all his many beautiful speeches, and it went like a flash of sunlight over all Europe. It was then he read aloud his voluntary royal assurance, and laid before the estates the new form of government, which was dutifully adopted with a three-fold yea, and promptly subscribed. Never was a change of government more successfully accomplished, or more quickly acknowledged. Over all the weary realm, the cheeriest echo flew with that report, and Sprengtport with his Finns arrived, according to the custom of the Finns, "the day after the fair." But a few of the foreign ministers let angry threatening words escape them, about the duty of neighbors to "defend the liberty of Sweden."

No one paid any attention to that. In the exultation of the people, the "time of liberty" was borne to its grave; and on the same day there was laid away in the Catholic church-yard the withered heart of a woman—a heart broken among strangers, for whom she had died unknown.

The following morning, Paul requested audience. The king had by this time forgotten him, which was pardonable after days like these.

"What do you wish, my friend?"

"A name, your majesty!"

"Ah, you are right. I promised you that. But are you also prepared to hear that name with the self-command which your country and your king have a right to demand of you?" asked the king, with a seriousness which resembled severity.

"Yes, your majesty."

"That is well. I can now, with more calmness than I could a few days ago, confide that secret to you. My throne now stands firmly rooted in the nation's love; I would like to see who would venture to try to snatch it from me. But in any case it is a serious matter. You perhaps remember that the Duke of Choiseul, two years ago, suddenly fell into disfavor with the king of France?"

"I remember."

"Do you know the reason?"

"It was said that he had been ruined by Countess Du Barry."

"Of course. Choiseul had always shown his contempt for that woman, and there was only one other person in France who dared do that. You know who that was?"

"Yes, your majesty."

"Du Barry was hated, like all favorites; but a hundred attempts to ruin that new Pompadour all miscarried. Choiseul and the rest of her enemies then conspired to procure a fearful rival for her in a young lady

of birth, a beauty, whose extraordinary genius had for some time already aroused the attention and admiration of all, particularly of the king of France. Du Barry's fall was thought to be certain. But in one important circumstance the conspirators had miscalculated,—the lady in question refused to agree to their proposal."

"Ah, your majesty, I begin to understand."

"Yes, my lord, that woman was too high-minded, too noble, to be willing, under such circumstances, to ascend a throne. The most brilliant propositions were made her, she was offered millions if she would give her consent, but she remained inflexible, and went to Sweden pursued by Countess Du Barry's fear and desire for vengeance. Then she one day saw my throne tremble, my kingdom almost precipitated into an abyss, and everything, in that decisive moment, depended on having time and money. Only one means of obtaining them existed, and the lady in question resolved, unknown to me, to avail herself of it. Too late, I found that she had employed, for my rescue, those millions and that influence which stood ready as the price of her consent. The money was only a loan which I shall repay; but you perceive that, with her character, that loan signified a death-sentence for the borrower. She was too great, too virtuous, to wear a life of shining dishonor. Instead of the stained throne of France, she preferred an unknown death as the savior of Sweden. You now know the name, my lord. Be revenged, if you can, on—Louis XV, King of France."

CHAPTER XX.

THE THIRD TRIAL.

ONE fine summer day, very early in the afternoon, Vera Bertelsköld was sitting with her governess, Lady Sjöblad, on a grassy seat near the shore at Falkby, reading aloud from a book rich in wisdom. It was Count Tessin's letters to Gustaf III as a child,—truths and moral rules clothed in the most graceful and agreeable language that ever "an old man" has spoken to "a young prince." But however agreeable that reading was, or perhaps ought to be, the book did not succeed in fixing the attention of the vivacious child. Vera's playful, happy eyes were often raised to her instructress with an expression which seemed to ask if that was not enough, and when she received no answer her glance flew furtively around on the blue fiord and the green islands, to the ducks plashing out upon the bay, or to the white sail over the opposite shore. In Vera there was always a resemblance to her mother, at that time when Esther Larsson took her perilous ride near the ramparts of Korsholm, and the girl was like an untamed colt, on which a bridle is for the first time laid, and which tugs impatiently at the unaccustomed reins.

Nature, too, was so lovely that she seemed to throw a green shadow on the page of the book. A mild summer warmth lay like a breath of love over all that charming landscape; a gentle breeze from the south-east rippled the mirror-like surface of the water; in the graceful swell of the wavelets played the Cyprinidæ; the forest breathed of health, and in the grain-field

near the shore the harvesters were seen, merrily binding the richly freighted sheaves.

The countess, when she selected Lotten Sjöblad as the instructress of her child, had not committed an error. She was a quiet, serious young lady, between twenty and thirty years of age, not handsome, but good and sensible. And that quiet, kind, calm and serious manner of the poor trouble-tried girl was just what drew the unruly child to her, and curbed with a single glance the willful disposition of the little one. Vera had made remarkable progress, and yet had not felt the burden of a fetter. She was free as the thrush in the branches over her head.

"What do you see over there?" asked Lady Sjöblad after a while, when she perceived that her pupil's short patience was beginning to give out.

"I am thinking if I were only a wild duck," replied Vera.

"And why do you wish to be a wild duck?"

"Then I would swim on the water, and then down the river to the sea, and then across the ocean, around the whole world. I would search for my mamma in every land and on every sea."

"Then you greatly long to see your mamma again?"

"Oh, so much!" said Vera, and her glistening eyes filled with tears.

"Perhaps your mamma will soon come back from her long journey; who knows? It will depend on whether she is pleased with you."

"How do you know that, *ma bonne?*"

"You see I often have letters from your mamma. Every week she writes to me what I shall teach you, and every week I write to her and tell her if you have been good or bad."

"I will not be bad! No, I will not be bad!" exclaimed the child, stamping in the soft grass with her little, untractable foot.

The governess smiled. "Why, what harm has that poor honeysuckle done you, that you are tramping on it so badly, and depriving the bee of its honey? But come, you may play duck awhile in the clear water."

They went to the pretty, green-painted bath-house at the water side, and before long they were both up to the arms in the pure, cooling water. Vera plashed as hard as she could with hands and feet.

"But that is not a duck, that is a frog," said the governess merrily.

When Vera had taken lessons awhile in the art of swimming, she asked for a chance to plash "just a little," after her teacher had gone up into the bath-house. It was so indescribably amusing. The water sprinkled around her, reflecting all the colors of a dolphin, while, laughing, and with her little fingers to her nose and her thumbs in her ears, she imagined herself diving under the surface of the water, though she was only dipping her nose into it. She looked up, triumphing over her skill, and became aware of a gentleman quite near her on the shore. Just a little surprised, she dived back, with her brown curls floating on the water, but soon recognized her own brother Paul.

"Good-day," he nodded.

"Do you want to see how I swim?" cried Vera, forgetting everything in delight over her new accomplishment. And, with her hands on the pebbles beneath, she executed, in her opinion, such remarkable feats as to deserve at least a master's diploma in that art, in case such things existed at that time.

Paul was obliged to laugh. That was the first time he had laughed in a long time, and it was like sunshine after a long, cloudy day.

After the toilets were made, and the brother and sister had embraced each other, Paul asked after his father and brother.

"About an hour ago they rode to old Flinta's cottage, over there on the point," replied Vera.

"Was not Bernhard once harsh to old Flinta?" said Paul.

"That was some time ago, Paul," said Lady Sjöblad. "You will no longer recognize your brother."

"Yes," piped Vera, "that was the time Bernhard was bad, so bad that I could have bitten him; but now I kiss him every day. Guess what he is doing over there on the point! He is building Flinta a cottage much better than the old one."

"Can we not row thither across the water?"

"Certainly we can. That is, if *ma bonne* has nothing against it?"

"You were in the water too long, so you can row to get warm again," said the governess, with a nod.

"Oh, how splendid!" exclaimed the happy child, and in her joy danced away a new cloud from her brother's brow. "You shall see how I can row! And I have little oars of my own! You will let me row with both of them, will you not, *ma bonne?* I am much stronger now than I was last summer, when I rowed with one oar."

"And next summer you will row with three!" merrily suggested Paul. "Now I will take the forward oars for my portion, you row with the others, and *ma bonne* steer. That will go like a Spanish quadrille."

No sooner said than done. The little boat, with the three excursionists, darted off like a sea-gull across the gently rippling water, and steered toward the widow Flinta's cottage, at the point upon the opposite shore.

Meantime the elder counts Bertelsköld, father and son, had ridden out on their usual afternoon excursion, partly to see to the harvesters, and partly to visit the octogenarian soldier-widow and her newly-hewn cottage. During the ride, they exchanged many words about the new agricultural improvements, and on the establishment, during the winter, of a public school at Falkby.

"Father," said Count Bernhard, "tell me how I can make amends for all my wrong-doing. It often seems to me as if a whole life would be insufficient for it. What signify all my repentance and resolutions, if they are not confirmed by manly action? I want to be a man, father; I want, henceforth, to be a nobleman in its widest sense, and I hope by that means not to become a stranger in the kingdom of God."

"And have you not a whole world in which to work, and all humanity to whom you can repay your debt to man? Work earnestly for your time and your people, and your wronged mother shall bless you, your offended God shall pardon you, not for *your* work, but for the work of him who bled on the cross."

When they had arrived at that part of the highway where a narrow footpath turned off toward the left to Flinta's cot by the shore, they were met by a carriage, whose foaming horses were being rapidly urged forward by the whip. In the carriage sat an elderly gentleman, who, at sight of the two horsemen, ordered his postillion to halt, and called them by name. It was General Pechlin.

"Right-about, and back to the village, my lords!" exclaimed the general, with more ardor than was usually to be found in that artful and deliberate champion of the diet. "Arm the people! Ring the alarm bells! Call them from their houses into the field, and show that you, gentlemen, are warriors and patriots!"

"Is your excellence joking, or is the enemy in the land?" asked father and son at once; for the mails had been detained in Stockholm, and the great news of the revolution had not yet reached this remote region.

"What?" again exclaimed Pechlin. "Do you not know, gentlemen, that the king has in the most infamous manner violated the form of government, imprisoned the patriots, and declared his power absolute, by the aid of a few wretches among the army officers, a few plebeian scoundrels, and Svenska Botten?"

"We have not heard a word of it."

"Rustic innocence! The devil take the whole Holstein league! I come directly from Stockholm, and have been delayed on the way by that traitor, Baron Hjerta, who wanted to arrest me; but I showed him the king's orders. Arm your house, I say, or it is all over with liberty! Fear nothing. I shall place myself at the head of the Jönköping regiment, we will call up the militia, and march to Stockholm to massacre those dogs and their actor on the throne. In three days we shall set all Sweden in flames!"

"But, your excellence, we must get more complete information before we proceed to such extremities. The government of the estates has really been as wretched as possible," objected Count Bernard.

The general caught fire. "What?" he exclaimed. "You argue against liberty, my lord? Have the goodness to take care of your head. Are you noblemen, my lords, and do not understand that the king wants to govern with the assistance of the plebeian rabble which is bought with a few plåts? Of course my lords have their sympathies. You have familiarized yourself with the mob. You have made the family illustrious with butter-dealers' receipts, and crowned the tar-barrel with the arms of a count. But I notify you, my lords, that we are going to vote such nobility out of the palace of nobles."

"Your excellence!" passionately burst out Count Charles Victor Bertelsköld. But he was interrupted by his son.

"Allow me to answer him, father," said Count Bernhard, "since I have hitherto had the honor of being considered of full-blooded race. Over there our harvesters are working. I declare to your excellence that we shall not take a single man from his work before we know with certainty whether his majesty has really trampled our liberty under foot. And as to those insulting words which your excellence has been

pleased to utter about our family connections, I repel them with disdain. Among the untitled classes exists quite as much honor as in the nobility, and, as a proof of it, I declare in the presence of your excellence and of the whole world that we *have the honor* of numbering in our family a person of untitled birth, with such noble and elevated principles that any prince or nobleman ought to consider himself honored by such a connection."

"Drive on!" shrieked the general in wrath, and without deigning to give the defender of "the mob" even a nod of farewell.

"I thank you, my son!" said Count Charles Victor, with emotion.

"Do not thank me, father," replied Count Bernhard. "I have a great wrong to retrieve, and I want to retrieve it."

Thoughtful and agitated by the great news, they continued the ride to the shore. They did not observe that a peasant-woman, who, concealed by a pine near the roadside, had heard their conversation with the general, was following them thither.

CHAPTER XXI.

AT FLINTA'S COTTAGE.

THE beautiful craggy point where the widow Flinta's cottage stood among the pines, lay half covered with chips, and from the new cottage, which was to be finished by autumn, the sound of the carpenters' axes and saws was heard. But Flinta still lived in her dilapidated hut; she did not like to leave it. "When I move," said she, "I shall move farther away."

She was now sitting on the bench by the steps, spinning woolen yarn for the winter, and softly humming a psalm to herself. At the shore stood her grandson, Martin, a fisher-boy of twenty years, whistling a merry tune while he tarred an over-turned boat. The spinning-wheel, the psalm, the whistled tune, the hum of insects, the whispering of the wind in the pines, and the monotonous murmur of the waves against the shore, all these were voices from animate nature, and set to music the beauty of evening, which extended in limpid light over the sunny landscape.

Then the old woman ceased her spinning, and, listening awhile to something which no one else heard, asked her grandson:

"Has *she* returned?"

"No," said the boy.

"Go and see where she has gone. There is something bad in the forest."

"What is it, grandmother?"

"I do not know. But it is something bad, and she is in danger. I know it, for certain."

"Pshaw, it is broad daylight!"

"Go, I say. The angel of God tells me that you ought to go."

Reluctantly the boy left his work, muttering something about the many foolish notions that get into old people in their second childhood. But, accustomed to obeying, he went whistling down the narrow footpath which led to the highway.

When he had thus walked awhile without perceiving anything strange, he unexpectedly encountered a giant, who seemed to be provided with two good-sized humps, one in front and the other on his shoulders. Martin was not one of the most timid, but at this sight he ceased whistling, and looked around for a retreat.

Meantime the giant came nearer, and was found to be an uncommonly large, athletic man, who was unconcernedly carrying in front of him, on his breast, a

juggler's cabinet containing a monkey, and on his shoulders a thin, swarthy fellow, in a curious costume, with a kind of capote of lynx-skin half drawn down over his ears.

"Halloa, peasant!" shouted the giant to Martin. "Is there a wigwam here? I have found a carcass by the roadside."

But Martin, who had found time to take a closer look at the man, with the appendages, replied, with an outcry, half amazement and half terror:

"Why! If it isn't black Joseph!"

At these words, the thin, swarthy man was seen to give a start; then he wrenched himself loose from the giant's neck, slid down to the ground, and glided off like a snake between the bushes. It was all done in a twinkling. The giant looked around bewildered, and scratching his head, said, "*Kas perkele!*"

And then Paul Bertelsköld's old friend Leo flung the juggler's cabinet, with the monkey, contemptuously from him. But Martin, without much reflection, took to his heels in pursuit of the fugitive.

When he had gone a little distance into the forest, he saw black José crouched behind a stone, and peering toward the foot-path. The Spaniard, who in this position bore an illusive likeness to a lurking lynx, was disengaging a long knife from his belt. He was notorious for an extraordinary dexterity in throwing that dangerous weapon long distances without ever missing his mark.

On the footpath, a woman in peasant garb was approaching with rapid step. She suspected no danger; she merely had her reasons for hurrying to Flinta's cottage.

Then black José half rose, his eyes glittering with revenge, and aimed at the woman a deadly throw. Martin was about to run to him, but was unexpectedly superseded. There was the report of a shot about fifty paces away, a light smoke rose above the willow

bushes, and the Spaniard tumbled across the stone, weltering in his own blood. It was evident that some one had taken him for that lynx which both externally and internally he so singularly resembled.

"What was that?" said the woman to Martin.

"It was black Joseph, who was trying to kill your grace," replied Martin, with a thump of his honest fisher heart.

A cloud passed over the noble brow of the peasant woman, but she did not hesitate for a moment as to what she ought to do.

"Take me to him!" said she.

Martin conducted her to the fallen assassin, who was lying behind the stone. He was still breathing. The ball had passed through his right shoulder.

"If the ball can be gotten out he can be saved," said the woman, after she had with experienced hand examined the wound and torn to pieces a fine handkerchief for the first dressing of the wound. "Where shall we get help to carry him to the village?"

"I will call that tall slow-poke over there," said Martin, pointing to Leo, who remained standing near the footpath, irresolute as to whether or not he would be justified in leaving the poor monkey alone in the forest to die of hunger.

But before Leo reached the spot, two horsemen had already approached along the foot-path, and one of them, with the discharged Spanish hunting-piece on his shoulder, had dismounted to find the supposed game which had fallen by his ball. It was Count Bernhard Bertelsköld.

"Mora from Östanlid! And José! What does this mean?" he exclaimed, in amazement, when he found the peasant woman near the stone, engaged in caring for the wounded man.

"I wanted to avenge you and myself, *señor!*" said the Spaniard, in a weak voice. "She and your brother

are to blame for it all. Caramba! I will pay them yet, if I live!"

"You shall live, José, not to be revenged, but to repent and to pray!" whispered the woman, seriously.

"Was I not on your account driven away from my situation?" muttered the wounded man.

"Yes. And for that you wanted to kill me and my son. But we too shall be revenged. We will heal your wound."

Before long a soft litter of branches had been prepared, and on this the Spaniard was borne to the village by Leo and Martin.

"Be kind enough, gentlemen, to tell that woman to take care of the monkey!" said Leo, pointing to the peasant woman. He could not prevail upon himself to leave his grinning *protégé* defenceless in the forest.

Without uttering a word, Count Bernhard mounted his horse, and step by step, often pausing and thoughtful, rode by his father's side, down toward the shore.

"Was not that Mora from Östanlid?" inquired the father.

"Yes," replied Count Bernhard.

Meantime the peasant woman had taken a shorter path across the mountain, and arrived before them at the cottage. Old Flinta was still sitting on her bench by the steps. While the spinning-wheel was humming, the waves glittering, the swallows darting hither and thither, and the sunshine falling like silver on the fiord, she heard the footstep of the comer.

"Are you safe and sound?" she asked.

"Yes," said the peasant woman, standing humbly as a penitent in the presence of that poor creature in her pious old age.

"Thank God! There is something which tells me that your hardest trial in this life is approaching its close."

"Yes, mother. And yet I tremble."

"Call me mother no more, for the time is come

when those to whom you belong ought to get you back. Why do you tremble? Has not the blessing of God followed you in prosperity and adversity?"

"Always! Always, mother!"

"Has not the very hardest heart on earth, which otherwise would perhaps never have been softened, been won to God and man by your flight?"

"Oh, not by me!"

"No, but by the power of God. And has not that man whom God appointed your defender, but who forgot his most sacred duty, been awakened to reflection by losing you, and does he not love you now more than ever before?"

"I think so, yes. But not by me!"

"No, once more and always by the hand of the Lord which guided your feet."

"That is true."

"And have you not watched over your younger son better, and more effectively, than you could have done if you had remained at home?"

"Perhaps. I do not know."

"And have you not, like an invisible angel, continually watched over your youngest child, who for awhile needed the care of a stranger, because her disposition was too much like your own?"

"Perhaps you are right."

"And has not God Almighty now, by the test of affliction, purified you all, purified yourself, and filled up that deep chasm which once threatened to bury your husband's whole family in mutual dissension?"

"I hope so!"

"Well, why then do you tremble? Why do you still delay praising God?"

"Because I am a poor, sinful woman, and am not pure before his holy face. Oh, mother, I once deceived!"

"You deceived? That is impossible!"

"It was one time in Stockholm. I wanted to try

my step-son, and he stood the test. But, thought I, the human heart is weak, and he must stand still more tests. And, as it could not take place otherwise, I altered the appearance of my face, and did not make myself known. Afterwards I bitterly repented it. I do not remember that I ever lied, except that one time, in my whole life."

"Is it so?" said the old woman gently; "then be of good heart, and learn in that also to recognize God's infinite grace. Behold, you have renounced more than most women, you have voluntarily separated yourself from the dearest you have on earth; alone, forsaken, reviled, you have suffered, and you have been rewarded with ingratitude, although, wherever you have been, you have returned good for evil. But the Lord saw that by such means you might become self-righteous, and proud of your merit and he therefore sent you that temptation into which you fell. You thought yourself wiser and stronger than you were, and the Lord punished you with a sin."

"That is true. I feel that I needed it. And even at this moment, the proud, willful spirit of my youth, which I have fought and fought my whole life long, dwells within me. It is very hard for me to come back to that house from which I have been driven, to come uncalled,—though it contains everything dear to me in this life. So sinful, so haughty you see I am still, in the depth of my heart!"

"Let me attend to that matter," said the old woman. "Go into my cottage. I hear the tramp of horses' hoofs on the ground, and they bring you your days of peace."

CHAPTER XXII.

AN EVENING IN ROSY CLOUDS.

THE two gentlemen dismounted from their horses, and looked over the new cottage. Both were silent and serious,—kingdoms and hearts were in agitation.

When they had inspected the work, they went, as was their custom almost every day, to talk awhile with the old woman. It will be remembered that she was the widow of one of those brave Carolins, almost all of whom had now disappeared from the earth. She had seen and known Major Gösta Bertelsköld, the father and grandfather of the present counts. She still remembered the twelfth Charles, and she knew and could talk about a great many strange exploits which had by this time died out of the memory of posterity. On her whitening hair lay the afterglow of a past epoch. What a deep impression must the mighty struggles, lofty heroism, and unprecedented trials of that Carolinian time have left behind them, when the trace of it was still discernible, so long afterward, in a rare elevation of mind even in the humble who had lived at that period! That soldier widow was only a very old and poor woman from the common people, without any knowledge except the living Word of God in her heart and the memory of past days on her lips; but about her there was something great and venerable, which exceeded the standard of the present day, and, as it were, cast over the century "the shadow of a name."

The two counts Bertelsköld, who were themselves of Carolinian stock, used therefore to like to spend an hour with the soldier-widow Flinta. Count Bernhard

had formed a friendship for her which resembled reverence, and it was touching to see with what care he sought to efface from her mind the memory of former acts of injustice. He had been the most zealous in procuring for the old woman a more comfortable dwelling. He had obtained for her a pension of fourteen plåts a year, which was a great deal for a soldier's widow. He had furnished her with new spinning-cards and wheel, a patch of ground for the culture of flax, and six fine sheep, besides the red-and-white cow, which was the old woman's darling. And a few weeks later, Martin had received from him the most beautiful net for fishing, by which the inhabitants of the hut had now become as comfortable and independent as they had formerly been poor and needy.

The two counts now sat down as usual on the steps, and, after they had exchanged a few words about the cottage and the fish, the elder count began to talk about the great news from Stockholm, and how the king had assumed the government. Old Flinta shook her white head, and said:

"God preserve the king. That is the prayer that morning and evening I heard offered when a child. I am not versed in the new times, but it seems to me that concord in the house makes a settled dwelling. For it is in love and by love that we must live. God rewards those who have a faithful heart."

The gentlemen did not reply. Their hearts were touched.

"And therefore I say, God reward the countess, your grace's wife, for she certainly carries a faithful heart," continued the old woman, without letting go the thread. "I wonder where she can be, and when she will come back?"

"There is a boat pushing out from Falkby landing," said the elder count, as he took a spy-glass out of his pocket; but he could see nothing, for there was something moist either on the glass or in his eye.

"What do you know about the countess?" asked Count Bernhard, who divined something beneath those words uttered as though in passing. "You know something, my good woman, and it is not right that you should keep it from us now."

"I know that much is different now from what it was when her grace went away," calmly replied the old woman, as she continued her spinning. "But I also know that she did not go away willingly or needlessly. You see there is something in a woman's heart which men do not understand. When men have anything on their minds, they rush about, and are in a condition to uproot the pillars of the earth, if it lay in their power. But when a good woman has a heart sorrow, she goes away to bleed in silence. It happened when I was young, that Peter Stål, who stood next to my Flinta in the ranks, used to say to his wife, 'I could have done better than to marry you, Karin,'—for you see his father had been a sergeant, but Karin was from a Falkby cottage. It was not so very badly intended, but Karin was one of the sort that would tolerate it nineteen or twenty times, and no more. When she heard the same thing for the twenty-first time, she went away and asked for a bill of divorce. And the whole parish was in amazement, for all knew that Karin was sensible and humble, and submissive to her husband in everything except honor. But now the question is whether she did right or wrong."

"She did right," said Count Bernhard, in a firm voice.

"I fear she did what a woman ought to do," sorrowfully added the father.

"But what do you suppose Peter Stål did, your grace, when he found out about it?" continued the old woman. "He went to the minister one Sunday at the close of service, when the most of the people were still in the church, and Karin with them, and then he said, so loudly that all heard it, 'I have a wife too good for me,

and if I had married the queen's maid of honor I could never have had so fine a wife as Karin. I am agreed as to the divorce, because I am not worthy of her.'"

"And what did Karin reply?" asked both the counts at once.

"Yes, what did she reply?" continued the old woman after a little pause, during which the peasant-woman, who inside the cottage had heard the conversation through the open window, had time, unobserved by the gentlemen, to step out, and silently draw near behind them. "Yes, what did she answer them? She answered by putting her arms lovingly around the neck of her husband . . . ."

At these words, Count Charles Victor Bertelsköld felt two soft arms close around his neck, and tears, warm as the gentlest summer rain, drop upon his face.

This was so unexpected, so surprising, that none of the four were able for some time to utter a word. The spinning-wheel ceased its humming, the insects their buzzing, the birds their twittering. Soft as the embrace of love did the wavelets seem to glide toward the green shores, and even the light clouds of the firmament seemed, glowing with tenderness, to reflect one of the most blessed moments in fleeting human life—the moment when two hearts, which had been separated by sin and sorrow, met again, never more to cease to beat for each other.

The first who broke the silence, the first who, without separating, set free that indissoluble embrace, was the old octogenarian, who had now paid her debt, also, for all favors shown her. She raised her trembling hands toward heaven, and offered an ardent, unspoken prayer, one of those thanksgivings without words, but which are heard to the very mansions of the blessed, and which was shared by all present. Afterward, when the greatest of all duties was fulfilled, and the burning gratitude of four hearts was sent to the throne of the

Most High, then the old woman wiped the tears from her withered cheeks, and said, with a gentle and pious smile:

"Well, what did Karin answer her husband at church?"

"She replied," said Countess Esther, who had now thrown the peasant-woman's concealing head-cloth off from her forehead, disclosing a pair of large, glistening, genuine pearls beneath the dark eye-lashes,—"she replied, 'Behold the hand of God is in mercy over us, unworthy creatures! We all stand before his tribunal with a debt on our conscience. How could we refrain from glorifying his name by pardoning each other? And so, as I promise you in his presence never more with the shadow of a thought to offend your love, I also beg you to pardon all the sorrow I have caused you, and all the lonely hours you have missed your wife—your wife who had sworn never to forsake you; and, believe me, there was a feeling in my heart as though I had lost everything on earth, when I no longer had you! But now I have you again, now I shall never again forsake you; I should no more be able to bear such a sorrow. And therefore I am the one who begs to be allowed to come back to you. Will you grant me such a great and undeserved joy?'"

"That is right, that is just what Karin said," rejoined the old woman at the spinning-wheel. "And upon that her husband answered . . . ."

"Her husband answered," interposed Count Charles Victor Bertelsköld, "that in the presence of God and man he acknowledged himself unworthy such a woman. And do you remember," said he, "that one day, twenty years ago, you predicted all this? But I, in my blind love, did not understand you. I knew neither the prejudices of mankind nor the weakness of myself. I believed myself strong, and therefore God sent me this trial. Now, for the first time, I know you and myself. I shall now no longer be self-confident; and yet, my

Esther, and yet we shall together have power to conquer the world!"

"And I, my mother! How shall I venture to lift my eyes to you?" said Count Bernhard, in an altogether different tone from that which a year ago he had used at this very same place.

Instead of answering him, Countess Esther threw her arms around his neck, and kissed him, as a mother kisses her loved and lost son when he is found again. "If I have ever felt my littleness and God's power," said she, "it has been when I have seen his work in you. Do you know, Bernhard, that we love the very most that for which we have suffered most? I saw you turn about on that path where so few return, and where everything seemed to unite to separate you from us. I saw you embrace your brother whom you once hated,—and could I help loving you? I knew of your second trial, amid the manifestations of the infidelity of the day; you remained strong in your faith,—and should I not thank God for you? Lastly, quite recently, I heard you reviled and threatened for my sake, and you took up my defence,—and do you still think that you are not dear to me? If you knew how it felt to have regained a son such as you, believe me, you would envy me, for to-day I clearly see a blessing on us all!"

While she was still speaking, the boat approached, with the three who had met at Falkby bathing-house. No one would have thought of Vera, if old Flinta had not pulled the countess's dress, and, with a delicacy of feeling which only a woman understands, had whispered to her, "Go into the house!"

The countess went in.

An instant later the boat landed. Paul fell into his father's arms, and cordially pressed the hand of his brother, without heeding their agitated feelings. But one who did observe it immediately was Vera. She looked at them with a troubled face, and almost with bewilderment.

"Well," said old Flinta, "will not the little lady call on her good friend there in the cottage?"

The old woman had a cat which had always enticed Vera to the pine-covered point, and a very pretty little kitten it was. That was what Vera, in her embarrassment, now went to caress. But when she went into the cottage, she saw a peasant woman sitting at the window, looking at her without saying a word.

Vera looked at her, and blushed to the tips of her ears,—then looked away in the belief that she had been mistaken,—then looked again at the stranger, and grew all the redder and more amazed. She did not venture to take a step, but stood as though nailed fast to the threshold.

Then the arms of the strange woman slowly extended. She did not speak a word, she did not change a feature, she did not stir from her place,—she only stretched forth her open arms.

"Mamma!" stammered Vera, almost inaudibly.

"Vera!" whispered the stranger, in a tone just as low.

And in a moment the daughter lay in the loving embrace of her mother,—and when those two met, no eye beheld them save the eye of Him who is omniscient.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MORNING OF THE REALM.

IN the latter part of August, the sun rises at five o'clock in the morning, and immediately after four dawn begins. On one such morning, both Bernhard and Paul Bertelsköld were up before the sun. There was something to do at Falkby.

In the first young beauty of the lovely morning,

the landscape lay transfigured. How fresh, how cool it was! The air was as pure as if it had flowed out of eternal fountains of health, and so transparent that the wings of the loon could be distinguished far in the blue ether. The dew lay, in large, bright drops, so thickly on the grass that the yard and park was strewed with twinkling diamonds. Over the shore still hung a light veil of the cool night-vapor, above which the airy foliage of the birch-trees and the dark verdure of the pines were outlined against the rosy morning sky. One could count every leaf, every needle, and all were silvery and shining, as though tearful with joy and beauty.

To those who are not accustomed to leaving their beds before sunrise, it is something rare to see the shadows of trees and buildings fall far toward the west, in the reflection of the crimson clouds of the east. The long shadows ordinarily resemble evening thoughts, and portend the night; but when they announce a vanishing darkness, a rising day, with what a totally different language do they then speak to the eye! Paul distinctly felt the night in his soul begin to brighten, and the morning of the new times begin to dawn before his vision.

In the park, a dozen young peasant boys and girls from the village had already for several hours been busily engaged with May-poles, leaf-decorations, and other mysterious things, near a new building over by the gate. The same summer-house which, the previous summer, had been garlanded for the count's birthday, was again the center of a coming festivity; and the prime mover of all this important preparation was honest old gardener Bergflygt, who, with all his good qualities, being somewhat slow to forgive, could not hitherto be prevailed on to forget the injustice he had suffered, but when he had found that his former mistress had returned from her long journey, had finally yielded. He worked now as though, by his redoubled zeal, he wished to make amends for his obstinacy; and

he was assisted, with clumsy but faithful efforts, by an athletic figure, who in the sweat of his brow was doing work enough for four others.

"Well, Leo," said Paul, "you did not flourish a great while in Stockholm!"

"It is easy to talk about flourishing when one has nothing to eat."

"But why did you come to Sweden?"

"Why? Because I got sent back the seventh time in theological examination. The flies had specked Gadolin's *codex*, till a horse could not read such Hebrew. So I thought, '*Olkoon!* I will join the king's dragoons.'"

"And that was why you huzzaed so desperately for the king! But you did not become a dragoon?"

"Of course not! When the king saw me, he laughed and said, 'If I had an elephant, my boy, you should immediately be a dragoon, but there is not a horse in the kingdom of Sweden able to carry you Do you want to be a file-leader in my foot-guards?' 'Thanks for the offer,' said I, 'that is beneath my dignity. I have seven times been beaten in theological examinations. I will go to Paul Bertelsköld,' said I. 'I would rather be his servant, for you see he too is an academic.' 'Well, well! Behold the learned!' said the king. 'That class of people have ambition.'"

"Do you want to be a schoolmaster, Leo, in our new common school?"

"Thank you; that would not be so bad. I shall well enough be able to beat common-sense into the boys."

"Agreed! My father has requested me to get some good fellow, and if you will promise not to beat your boys to death from sheer good intention, the rest will take care of itself. I suppose you will see that no flies speck the Catechism?"

"God bless you! Why, I knew that you were

going to be a *civis*,—and next time we fight with the journeymen, just call on me," said Leo, blowing his nose four times, in the delight of his heart.

Meantime the sun, mildly and majestically as the fairy-queen of the sagas, rose above the tree-tops. The sea and the forest sparkled, and the face of humanity was radiant with joy. It was a glorious morning after a murky night.

Gradually the rest of the dwellers at Falkby also awakened, and among the earliest was the countess herself. Like a good spirit, she was present everywhere, and thought of everything and everybody except herself. But Countess Esther had no suspicion that the festivity was in a great measure in her own behalf.

For to-day at Falkby, as in all the kingdom of Sweden, the rescue of the country from anarchy and dissolution was to be celebrated with a happy popular festival. Trustworthy advices had now arrived from Stockholm, and General Pechlin had utterly deceived himself as to the mind of the people. Not a man thought of taking up arms; everybody had become wearied out with the eternal squabbling of the estates, and with unmingled delight greeted the elevation of the beloved young king to a power which he used with so much courtliness, and which gave more real guaranty for the nation's liberty than the mercenary government and the implacable spirit of persecution under the political parties had ever done. All the kingdom of Sweden was at that time in a transport of happy excitement, acquaintances and strangers embracing each other when they met in the streets, and the cheer for the king spread from the Swedish metropolis in long and reverberating echoes from mountain to mountain and from valley to valley, from the shores of the North Sea to the fiords of Saima, and from the rippling waves of the Sound to the Laplanders' fisher-huts far away by the lonely shores of Lake Enare.

When Count Charles Victor Bertelsköld, therefore, somewhat later in the bright morning, appeared in a pretty festooned balcony in Falkby park, and spoke to the assembled people manly, noble words about the danger of the kingdom, of the machinations of foreign powers, of the unhappy dissension which for the last fifty years had divided the people, and of the young king's courage in hazarding crown and life for the rescue of his realm,—and when he afterward exhorted all freely and frankly to take their oath of allegiance to the new form of government, that they would faithfully, amid all changes, live and die for law and liberty, for king and country,—then also went up from the hearts of that assembled crowd one single immeasurable chorus of cheers, and the oath was confirmed by a "Long live the king!" louder than that cry had sounded since the days of the great Gustaf Adolf, a hundred and fifty years before. The honest Ostrogoths were delirious with joy. They shouted themselves so hoarse that they could scarcely whisper, and with their cheer mingled the bass of the gigantic Finn, like the roaring of a lion.

That day was a holiday for all Falkby; and a magnificent banquet was spread for the people on long tables in the park. Old Flinta had the place of honor. Her objections were of no avail, and she was made to sit at the head, between the count and countess, and, fair and venerable, sat there like a past age, with her snow-white hair, and her pious, humble expression. On either side of them sat Bernhard and Paul Bertelsköld; next to them the pastor of the parish; beside him Lady Sjöblad; and beside her, Vera, who had begged to be wakened at four o'clock in the morning, but happened by mistake to sleep until nine. Next to them again were seen a couple of returned representatives, who ate and drank for the happy journey of the estates; beyond them Bergflygt, Leo, Martin, and other intimate friends of the house, even the Skånian, Rasmus,

who swore that the very mares in the stable were shouting hurrah for the king.

The jest was not elegant, but it had a meaning. For if at this time the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, the fishes of the sea, and even the gray granite of the primeval mountains of Sweden and Finland, had possessed a speaking tongue, they would have shouted over land and sea: "Long live King Gustaf!"

And the evening and the morning were the first day in the kingdom of Sweden.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MORNING LIGHT AT FALKBY.

THE festival was not yet complete, and after its political exultation followed the individual joy. When the meal was ended, the count of Falkby again went up into the balcony and commanded silence.

"My friends," said he, "I have something yet to tell you. God has given me that which every man must desire, and that is a good wife. She is a daughter of the people; she does not blush for it, and I regard it as an honor. Through her, you perceive, our family stands in the midst of the people, as I stand here among you; and before us no longer exists high or low, but each will be regarded according to his worth as a human being. Now when my wife went away, more than a year ago, I secretly promised that, if God helped her safely back, we should to all time preserve the memory of her return. That has now occurred; and over there by the gate stands a new house, which is to be called *Esther's Gard.* Half of that building will be a public school, and the other half an asylum for poor, mother-

less children. If you will go thither with me, we will ask our good pastor to invoke the blessing of the Lord on that new house,—on Esther's Gard."

At these words, an indescribable jubilation arose from the assembled crowd. They thronged around the countess; they vied in kissing her garments, but she would not allow that. One after another she took them by the hand, and reminded them that she was the daughter of an humble man, and that they should regard her as one of themselves. And thus they all moved on to the new institution.

The new building was so enveloped with flowers and leaves that it resembled a bower. Six poor children, adorned with flowers, and conducted by Vera, met the countess at the steps, and handed her the keys of the house, while they sung, to an old English melody, some verses composed by Paul, which closed with the following words:

"In Esther's gard
Are home and ward;
In Esther's care
Blest is the air.
To God be praise,
Who Esther sends
A court like this,
Where sorrow ends,
And care gives place
In her embrace."

"Yes," whispered Count Bertelsköld to his wife, who was deeply affected, "this shall be your court! Were you not once told that you were a born princess? Well, that was truly spoken. This shall be your kingdom! This crown is your own!"

"This joy is too great!" whispered the countess. "And that house was not erected in a day; you must have been thinking about it a long time?"

"And what should I have been thinking about, during that long time I was without you, if not of your return? There is something else which I will

confide to you alone. Old Flinta will not long need her new cottage, so I have appropriated a little fund continually to maintain, after her death, one poor and pious old woman in her cottage. And the point of land where she lives shall always henceforth be called Cape Peace. Are you pleased with that?"

The countess pressed his hand.

The pastor then made a speech to the people, not without the froth of the time in harangues to the titled master and mistress; but when he observed a cloud on their brow, he abruptly changed his course, and spoke so finely about a Christian education, and the poor little children who had here found an asylum, that all again stood with wet eyes in the newly-hewn cottage. Then the benediction was pronounced on Esther's Gard, the people sung a psalm, and the ceremony was ended.

When the count and countess walked out on the steps, they found there a dear guest who had just arrived—Baroness Louise Clairfield, *née* Bertelsköld, who had but just returned from Berlin. She was dressed in mourning for her husband, and her volatile but not bad heart had softened under affliction. Her husband had left nothing behind him but debts: her brief period of elation was past, and she had come to spend the rest of her life in her paternal home.

"We are all here now!" joyfully exclaimed Countess Esther. "No one was lacking but you, my Louise!"

"My mother!" said the former lady of the world, as she sunk with emotion into her step-mother's arms. She too had ceased to say "*madame*."

Louise Clairfield had been accustomed to gather all her impressions and rules of life from her admired brother Bernhard. When she saw him so utterly different from what he used to be,—as unlike himself as a human being, by the total transformation of the mind, heart, and thoughts, can become,—she was at first

startled and apprehensive. But with a woman's instinct she soon began to understand her brother. He smiled when he perceived her amazement. "I see you are astonished at finding me so changed," said he. "That is because you have never known Mora from Östanlid."

The people were afterward amused the whole day with games in the park. But over Paul's handsome dark eyes lay a touch of sadness, for he recognized the baroness' new waiting-maid, who was tripping across the yard with a well-known saucy air. It was the incorrigible, cunning, pert Babette.

But his thoughts soon received a happier impulse when Count Bernhard showed him a recently arrived letter from Eric Ljung, who was well, in his happy Surutoin, with his brisk Erica, and who sent word that he had now concluded the purchase of the mentioned estate in Finland on Count Bernhard's account. "Cecilia Larsson," so ran the letter, "sends word to her friend Paul that the oak at Surutoin has grown higher than the roof, and she encloses to him the accompanying leaf from her prettiest rose."

Paul no longer saw Babette. He kissed the rose-leaf.

And thus was the evening and the morning at Falkby. But out in the park the voices of children were still heard singing:

"In Esther's Gard
Are home and ward;
In Esther's care
Blest is the air.
Our God we bless
Who Esther sends
A court like this!"

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